NATION

Placements over but 40% IIT students are still jobless

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Sensex, Nifty hit record highs; HDFC, TCS gain

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Sindhu opts out of Uber Cup; but strong side for Thomas Cup title defence

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Sandeshkhali culprits will be in jail: PM

Oppn is spreading lies about CAA, all those who have faith in India will get citizenship: Modi

COOCH BEHAR, 4 APRIL

Prime Minister on Thursday claimed that all culprits of Sandeshkhali—where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders surfaced—will spend the rest of their lives in jail.

He also targeted West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and said the entire country saw how the Trinamool threw its weight to save the culprits.

In an apparent dig at Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Modi thanked her and the state government for not creating any hurdles in organizing the rally here.

He also slammed INDIA for spreading canards about Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), asserting that it is "Modi ki guarantee to provide citizenship to those who have faith in Maa Bharati (Mother India)".

Addressing a mega rally at Rash Mela grounds in West Bengal's Cooch Behar, Modi criticised Opposition for their efforts to protect the corrupt, asserting his determination to ensure their punishment and promising even stricter action in the next five years.

Urging people to elect a strong government, Modi said for the country to become the world's third-largest economy, there is a need to have a "majboot sarkar" (stable government) at the Centre.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an election campaign rally in support of NDA candidates ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

"INDIA never cared for marginalised communities. TMC, Left, and Congress never cared for the Rajbanshi, Namasudra, and Matua communities. Now that we have brought CAA, they are spreading rumours and lies.," he said.

His comments come against the backdrop of a campaign by Opposition parties, including TMC, which has claimed that applying for CAA would turn legal citizens into foreigners.

According to the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), rules of which were notified on 13 March, the government will now start granting Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants - Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, and Christians - from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan who arrived in India before 31 December, 2014.

Sending out a strong message to those who indulge in corruption, Modi said, "The opposition alliance is busy indulging in the politics of lies and deceit."

"I am saying remove corruption; the Opposition is saying 'save the corrupt.' I will ensure the corrupt are punished, and the poor get justice. In the next five years, more stringent action will be taken against the corrupt," he said.

Mocking Left-Congress alliance fighting against the TMC in Bengal, he said, "Here, they fight against each other but stand united in Delhi." —*PTI*

Shameful even if claims are 1% true, HC raps TMC

KOLKATA, 4 APRIL

- High Court said West Bengal's image as the safest state for women will fall following it. Petitioner-lawyer Priyanka Tibrewal submitted a voluminous compilation before the court which she said contained around 100 affidavits of alleged victims of sexual assault, apart from those of land grabbing and violence

Calcutta High Court on Thursday said that it would be "highly shameful" if even one per cent of the allegations of sexual assault in Sandeshkhali were found to be true. The court added that West Bengal's image as the safest state for women will fall following it.

Petitioner-lawyer Priyanka Tibrewal submitted a voluminous compilation before the court which she said contained around 100 affidavits of alleged victims of sexual assault, apart from those of land grabbing and violence.

"If at least one per cent (of the allegations) is true, it is highly shameful," a division bench presided by Chief Justice TS Sivagnanam said.

The division bench was hearing a suo motu motion on alleged sexual assault and land grabbing at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas district and petitions seeking transfer of investigation of these cases to CBI.

Opposing the prayers for transfer of investigation, West Bengal's Advocate General Kishore Dutta claimed before the division bench that central agencies have lost the trust posed in them.

He questioned the conviction rate of central agencies in cases they were probing in the state, while the Enforcement Directorate's counsel accused it of non-cooperation in taking forward investigations.

Tibrewal, who prayed for transfer of investigation to the CBI, placed before the division bench, also comprising Justice Hiranmay Bhattacharyya a number of complaints by alleged victims. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Don't fall prey to Cambodia job scam: MEA to Indians

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

External Affairs Ministry on Thursday cautioned Indian nationals against falling prey to human traffickers promising lucrative job opportunities in Cambodia. In an advisory, Ministry called upon Indians looking at job opportunities in the Southeast Asian country to thoroughly check the background of the prospective employer. "It has come to attention that Indian nationals, lured by fake promises of lucrative job opportunities in Cambodia, are falling into the trap of human traffickers," it said. It said Indian nationals are "coerced" to undertake online financial scams and other illegal activities. "Indian nationals intending to visit Cambodia for employment are cautioned to do so only through authorised agents," it said. —*PTI*

Musk's X activates 'Community Notes' ahead of LS polls

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Social media platform X has expanded its 'Community Notes' program to India, a fact-checking type feature that allows people to collaboratively add context to potentially misleading posts. The activation of 'Community Notes' program in India comes at a crucial juncture when the world's most populous democracy is scheduled to hold Lok Sabha elections over seven-phases between 19 April and 1 June. Elon Musk, the billionaire boss of X (formerly Twitter), in a post said, "Community Notes now active on India!" Welcoming new contributors in India, X's official 'Community Notes' handle posted Community Notes now has contributors in 69 nations around the world, it said, adding "and we're adding more regularly". X described Community Notes as a collaborative way to keep people better informed. —*PTI*

HC says no to plea seeking removal of Kejriwal as CM

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The Delhi High Court on Thursday refused to entertain a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking the removal of Arvind Kejriwal as Chief Minister following his arrest in the excise policy-linked money laundering case, saying it was his "personal call".

A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora said it recently dismissed a similar PIL seeking Kejriwal's removal from the chief minister's post and thus, it cannot take a different view.

"At times, personal interest has to be subordinate to national interest but that is his personal call. If he does not want to do that it is up to him. We are a court of law and have to go by the law. Your remedy does not lie here, it lies elsewhere. You go before the competent forum," the bench said.

As the court refused to interfere in the matter, petitioner Vishnu Gupta's lawyer said he has instructions to withdraw the petition and that he will approach Delhi Lieutenant Governor (LG) VK Saxena with his plea. The court disposed of the plea while allowing the petitioner to withdraw it. During the hearing, the petitioner's counsel said a constitutional deadlock has been created following Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on the night of March 21.

Delhi High Court said it was his "personal call" **PHOTO: PTI**

The court, however, made it clear that it cannot decide the matter and it is up to the LG or the President of India to take a call on the issue.

"How can we declare that the government is not functioning? LG is fully competent to decide it. He (LG) does not need our guidance. He will do whatever he has to in accordance with law," the bench said. Constitutional morality will be considered by LG or President as they are the competent authorities. —*PTI*

NOMINATION RALLY

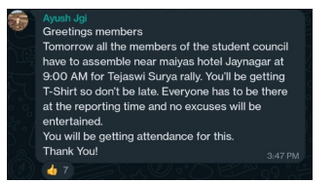
Students forced to attend Tejasvi Surya's rally: Cong

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Karnataka Pradesh Youth Congress Committee (KPYCC) has accused certain colleges in Bengaluru of forcing students into participating in the nomination rally of BJP MP Tejasvi Surya on Thursday.

Former MLA and Congress leader Sowmya Reddy, who is contesting against Surya in Bengaluru South Lok Sabha constituency, shared screenshots from student WhatsApp groups, where messages supposedly from college managements instructed students to attend the rally or face punitive actions. The messages, attributed to private colleges in VV Puram and Basavanagudi, stated that attendance would be recorded, causing confusion and concern among the students. Reddy called upon Chief Election Commission to take action against the MP.

One message from Jain College in VV Puram instructed students to assemble for Surya's rally, promising attendance records and T-shirts.


Ayush Jgi
Greetings members
Tomorrow all the members of the student council have to assemble near maiyas hotel Jaynagar at 9:00 AM for Tejaswi Surya rally. You'll be getting T-Shirt so don't be late. Everyone has to be there at the reporting time and no excuses will be entertained.
You will be getting attendance for this.
Thank You!
3:47 PM
7

A screenshot from a WhatsApp group of students **PHOTO: X/@Sowmyareddyr**

- Jain College Principal Naveen Kumar CM denied any official directive from college regarding student participation in the political event

The message stated "Tomorrow, all the members of the student council have to assemble near Maiyas Hotel Jayanagar at 9am for the Tejaswi Surya rally. You'll be getting a T-shirt so don't be late. Everyone has to be there at the reporting time and no excuses will be entertained. You will be getting attendance for this. Thank You!".

However, the principal of Jain College, Naveen Kumar CM, denied any official directive from the college regarding student participation in the political event, pledging to investigate the matter and take appropriate action against those responsible.

While some students claimed that participation in political activities was voluntary, others expressed confusion over the messages circulating in student WhatsApp groups. Dhanush Reddy (@DhanushMReddy) tweeted "Please look into this, attendance given for attending nomination rally??"

When **Salar News** tried to contact Surya for his reaction, he was unavailable for the comment. —*Salar News*

BJP MLA booked for 'luring' Congress worker

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

An FIR has been lodged against former minister and BJP MLA M Munirathna and four others over allegations of luring a Congress worker to join BJP.

The complaint was filed by a painter from Lakshmidevi Nagar, Samuel, prompting the police to initiate legal action against Munirathna and his associates Suresh, Vasanth, Wasim, and Seena, citing charges of kidnapping. According to the victim's statement, Munirathna's supporters purportedly coerced him into visiting the MLA's office under the guise of a two-day discussion, where he was allegedly threatened to join BJP. However, Munirathna refuted the accusations.

Munirathna threatened me with life, he stated in his complaint.

Nandini layout police have registered a case in the matter. —*Salar News*

Bandages contain cancer causing chemicals: Study

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Bandages from some of the well-reputed brands, including Johnson and Johnson, Band-Aid and Curad, contain dangerous levels of forever chemicals, a report shows.

After testing 40 bandages from 18 different brands the study has concluded that 26 out of those had detectable levels of organic fluorine, an indicator of harmful PFAS chemicals. The levels were above 10 parts per million (ppm).

PFAS are toxic "forever chemicals," used to make adhesives, and investigators believe they are products of the normal manufacturing process. Fluorine, which is also used to make rocket fuel, can lead to skin burns and eye damage, but it is most dangerous when inhaled.

Dr Linda Birnbaum, a toxicologist and former head of the National Toxicology Program who co-led the lab testing, said the fact that risky chemicals come in direct contact with open wounds was 'troubling'.

These chemicals can enter the bloodstream through open wounds, potentially leading to a variety of health issues.

Once in the bloodstream, PFAS can lodge themselves within healthy tissue where it can begin to damage the immune system, the liver, the kidneys, and other organs.

The bandages that contain high levels of fluorine above 100 parts per million include brands Band-Aid, Care Science, Curad, CVS Health, Equate, First Honey, Rite Aid brand, Solimo, and Up & Up, Target's brand. PFAS substances contain bonds between carbon and fluorine atoms, creating one very resilient chemical that can remain in the environment for years or even decades. The chemicals are everywhere, most commonly in water and stain-repellent products, as well as nonstick cookware. Teflon, kitchen staple nonstick coating is made with a fluorocarbon called polytetrafluoroethylene. —*Courtesy, Daily Mail*

SMILES ARE BACK

Child trapped in borewell rescued after 20-hour op in Vijayapura

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

After an 20-hour-long operation, a two-year-old boy who fell into a 16-feet-deep borewell in Vijayapura district was successfully rescued on Thursday afternoon by a 40-member State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) team from Belagavi and Kalaburagi. The child, identified as Satwik Mujagonda was rescued by digging an alternative pit.

Speaking to Salar News, the Commandant from SDRF Belgaum, Arvinda R, said, "Digging the alternative pit was challenging due to the hard rock on the property. The rescue equipment included chipping hammers, ropes, and an aerator system, which pushes air and oxygen into the septic system to safeguard the child."

The two-year-old child, identified as Satwik Mujagonda, was rescued by digging an alternative pit **PHOTO: SALAR**

"We rescued the child around 3.00pm without causing any injuries to the child." Gurunath AC, Deputy Commandant of the SDRF team from Kalaburagi said.

Satwik was taken to a hospital for a CT scan after the rescue work. Medical Officer Archana Kulkarni said, "The baby has survived without light, air and food for 18 hours and Satwik is in good health."

Satwik had fallen into open borewell while playing in a field on Wednesday. The borewell had been left uncovered, leading to the accident. —*Salar News*

3 planning terror acts held near Nepal border

LUCKNOW, 4 APRIL

The Uttar Pradesh Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) on Thursday arrested three men near the Nepal border who were allegedly planning to "commit terror activities in India", according to officials.

The trio included two Pakistani nationals and were carrying forged Indian identity proofs, a statement released by the ATS said.

"Acting on an intelligence input that some terrorists with an aim to commit terror activities in India are going to enter via Indo-Nepal border, a team of Gorakhpur ATS unit was put on alert. The unit on Thursday arrested three accused while entering India via the Indo-Nepal border," the statement read.

The accused are Mohammad Altaf Bhatt, a resident of Rawalpindi, Sayyed Gajnafar, a native of Islamabad and Nasir Ali, a resident of Jammu and Kashmir, it said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Illicit liquor worth over ₹98cr seized in Mysuru

MYSURU, 4 APRIL

The Excise Department headed by the Joint Commissioner recovered a huge amount of illicit liquor worth Rs 98.52 crore from a unit of United Breweries in Mysuru district, officials said on Thursday.They found excessive beer than declared to the government authorities. It included a whopping 7,000 cartons of beer."A case has been registered against the brewery unit after confiscating the worth of illegal liquor. According to an anonymous phone call received at the District Election Officer's office on Tuesday, District Collector and District Election Officers visited the brewery unit," the Deputy Commissioner said. A case has been registered against 17 people allegedly involved in the irregularities uncovered.

—Salar News with Agencies

BBMP offices will get aerators to save water

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) is expediting the installation of aerators in government offices and other institutions across the City. A circular has been issued by BWSSB, making it mandatory to install aerators in faucets used for cleaning in various places including malls, government buildings and religious places.In the first phase, aerators were installed in all Jal Mandal offices. Now, in the second phase, important offices like BDA, BSNL, Indira Canteen, Income Tax, BBMP schools, ISRO and others have been fitted with 4,000 aerators.

V Ram Prasath Manohar, Chairman of BWSSB said Jal Mandal offices are implementing the use of aerators to encourage public adoption.

—Salar News

Prestige buys 21 acres in Bengaluru for ₹450cr

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Realty firm Prestige Group has acquired 21 acres of land in Whitefield, Bengaluru, for Rs 450 crore to develop a housing project and is expecting a revenue of Rs 4,500 crore over the next four years.

In a regulatory filing on Thursday, Prestige Estates Projects Ltd said the acquired land will be planned for residential development comprising about 1,800 apartments.It has diversified business model across various segments, viz residential, office, retail, hospitality, property management and warehouses with operations in more than 12 major locations in India.

The group has completed 300 projects spanning a developable area of 188 million sq ft.*—PTI*

DKS confident of 'Cong creating history' in LS polls

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar ahead of Lok Sabha polls once again retorted of Congress creating history by winning a large number of Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka.

Earlier, Shivakumar on Tuesday said that Congress will register victory on more than 20 seats in the State in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls."We are discussing the support of about 10 parties of the INDIA bloc in Karnataka. It is not important how many votes they bring to the table but we are more keen on the people who follow their ideology," he added.

Karnataka will have elections in two phases on 26 April and 7 May for 28 constituencies. Karnataka has 28 Lok Sabha constituencies, including five seats for SC candidates and two for ST candidate.

—ANI

484 candidates file papers for 1st phase

JD(S) headed by ex-PM HD Deve Gowda joined BJP-led NDA in September last year

Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda blessing his son and Mandya Lok Sabha candidate HD Kumaraswamy before filing papers at his home in Bengaluru; Congress' Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha candidate Mansoor Ali Khan seeks blessing from Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji on Thursday in City. He was accompanied by Congress' Bengaluru North and South candidates Rajeev Gowda and Sowmya Reddy; Bengaluru South MP Candidate Tejasvi Surya along with Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur, Rajya Sabha MP Jaggesh, MLAs R Ashok, Sathish Reddy, Ramamurthy, former BBMP members after filing nomination in Bengaluru on Thursday ***PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD/ SALAR***

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy, his brother-in-law and cardiologist CN Manjunath, Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya were among 484 candidates, who filed their papers on Thursday. Thursday was the last day for filing nominations for the first of two-phase Lok Sabha polls in State, on 26 April.

Kumaraswamy, a former chief minister is contesting from the Mandya Lok Sabha seat. He was accompanied by BJP veteran BS Yediyurappa, Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant and party candidate from neighbouring Mysuru and scion of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar.

JD(S) headed by former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda joined the BJP-led NDA in September last year.

Kumarasway, ahead of filing his nomination visited a temple, and his parents -- Deve Gowda and Chennamma and took their blessings. Both BJP and JD(S) leaders later also addressed a joint public meeting.

As part of the seat-sharing deal, BJP would contest in 25 constituencies and JD(S) in the remaining three -- Mandya, Hassan and Kolar -- in Karnataka.

Manjunath, who is Deve Gowda's son-in-law, also filed his nomination as BJP candidate from Bangalore Rural Lok Sabha segment, as per the arrangement between both alliance partners.

He filed his papers accompanied by wife Anasuya, BJP leaders and MLAs C N Ashwath Narayan, Munirathna, and M Krishnappa.

In Bengaluru South, BJP Yuva Morcha national President and sitting MP Tejasvi Surya filed his papers. He earlier held a rally and a road show, during which he was joined by Union Minister Anurag Thakur, Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka among other leaders both from BJP and JD(S).

In Tumakuru, former MP Muddahanumegowda S P filed his nomination as a Congress candidate, accompanied by Home Minister G Parameshwara and Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna among others. They also held a roadshow.

Congress' Chitradurga candidate BN Chandrappa, and his BJP opponent and former Deputy Minister Govind Karjol too filed their papers today. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah held a rally in favour of Chandrappa.

Captain Brijesh Chowta, BJP candidate from Dakshina Kannada, JD(S) candidate from Kolar Mallesh Babu, are among the others who filed their nominations on Thursday.In Hassan, sitting MP and JD(S) candidate Prajwal Revanna, who had filed his nomination earlier, once again filed his papers today, after a mega roadshow during which he was accompanied by his grandfather Deve Gowda, BJP state president B Y Vijayendra, former CM Sadananda Gowda among others.As many as 14 out of the 28 Lok Sabha seats will be going for polls in the first phase. Scrutiny of nominations will take place on April five and April eight is the last day for withdrawal of papers.

—Salar News

CONSTITUENCY	CANDIDATE	ASSETS	CRIMINAL CHARGES
Bengaluru Central	BJP: P C Mohan INC: Mansoor Ali Khan	112.12 crore 91.79 cr	4 1
Bengaluru North	BJP: Shobha Karandlaje INC: Rajeev Gowda	13.88 cr 134.04 cr	4 NIL
Bengaluru Rural	BJP: Dr C N Manjunath INC: D K Suresh	43.64 cr 593 cr	NIL 3
Bengaluru South	BJP: L S Tejasvi Surya INC: Soumya Reddy	4.10 cr 2.30 cr	3 6
Chamarajanagar	BJP: S.Balaraju INC: Sunil Bose	89.63 lakh 7.84 cr	NIL 1
Hassan	JD(S): Prajwal Revaana INC: Shreyas M Patel	18.52 cr 42.67cr	NIL 1
Dakshina Kannada	BJP: Capt Brijesh Chowta INC: R Padmaraj	43 lakhs 8.3 lakhs	1 NIL
Mysuru- Kodagu	BJP: Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar INC: M. Lakshmana	4.74 cr 3.03 cr	NIL 4
Mandya	JD(S) HD Kumarswamy INC: Venkataramane Gowda	217.21 crore 23.71 cr	3 NIL
Kolar	BJP: M. Mallesh Babu INC: Goutham K V	16.75 cr 11.82 Cr	2 2
Udupi-Chikkamagaluru	BJP:Kota Srinivas Poojary INC: K. Jayaprakash Hegde	6.46 cr 15.34 cr	NIL NIL
Chitradurga	BJP: Govind Karjol INC: B N Chandrappa	3.15 cr 6.60 LAKHS	NIL NIL

Divide in Congress widens over Kolar seat

KOLAR, 4 APRIL

As the Lok Sabha elections draw near, the differences among the top Congress leaders in Kolar seem to be worsening. The factions led by KH Muniyappa and former Legislative Assembly Speaker KR Ramesh Kumar showed up with party candidate KV Gowtham separately on Thursday to file a nomination, sending a message that all is not well with the party in the district.

Gowtham arrived at the returning officer's office to file his nomination once with a team including district in-charge Minister Byrathi Suresh and MC Sudhakar, and again with Muniyappa and his daughter Roopakala, who is KGF MLA.

Gowtham had earlier said that he would take leaders of both factions together and would win the elections. Gowtham later downplayed any difference among the leaders and said he filed two sets of nominations separately to accommodate all the top leaders. He said he enjoys the support of all the Congress leaders in the Lok Sabha constituency.

Gowtham was chosen by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar as a 'neutral' candidate after a massive political drama erupted over Kolar Lok Sabha ticket, wherein at least 5 MLAs, including a sitting minister, and two MLCs threatened to resign from the party over reports that the Kolar ticket was being given to Muniyappa's family.

—Salar News

Eshwarappa: Shah declined to meet me

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Former Karnataka deputy chief minister KS Eshwarappa, who is contesting as a rebel candidate against BJP's BY Raghavendra from Shivamogga Lok Sabha seat, on Thursday claimed Union Home Minister Amit Shah did not meet him as he found it difficult to respond to questions raised by him.

Eshwarappa, a senior BJP leader, said he went to Delhi as Shah had summoned him but the meeting could not happen.

"I went to Delhi as I was summoned. If I had not gone there then they would have called me arrogant. I could not meet Amit Shah. I think the meeting did not happen because I had asked him certain questions, which he found difficult to answer," the former BJP state president claimed.

Eshwarappa has entered the electoral fray in Shivamogga constituency as an independent, against Raghavendra, son of BJP veteran BS Yediyurappa.

The veteran BJP leader said Shah must have thought that whatever he was doing was justified as he was fighting for justice.

"He only had called me to Delhi and did not meet me," he claimed. Further, the 75-year old leader alleged, "in Karnataka, Congress culture has crept into BJP where Yediyurappa's family politics is prevailing."

Sources close to Eshwarappa said he wanted a ticket for his son KE Kantesh from Haveri constituency, which did not happen.

This upset him and he blamed Yediyurappa for the same. Hence, he decided to fight the election against Yediyurappa's elder son Raghavendra. *—PTI*

I went to Delhi as I was summoned. If I had not gone there then they would have called me arrogant. I could not meet Amit Shah. I think the meeting did not happen because I had asked him certain questions, which he found difficult to answer

-KS Eshwarappa, Former deputy chief minister

SC recommends 5 new permanent HC judges

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud has recommended to the Centre the names of five additional judges of the Karnataka High Court for appointment as permanent judges of that court.

The three-member collegium also recommended that Justice Gurusiddaiah Basavaraja be appointed as an additional judge of the Karnataka High Court for a fresh term of one year with effect from 16 August. As per an 3 April resolution which also includes Justices Sanjiv Khanna and BR Gavai, the High Court collegium had on 20 January unanimously recommended that five additional judges be appointed as permanent judges and the term of additional judge Basavaraja be extended for a further period of one year."Chief Minister and the Governor of the State of Karnataka have conveyed their agreement with the above recommendation," the apex court collegium noted in the resolution uploaded on its website.

"Having considered all aspects of the matter and on an overall consideration of the above proposal, the Collegium is of the view that Justices Cheppudira Monnappa Poonacha, Anil Bheemsen Katti, Chandrashekhar Mrutyunjaya Joshi, Umesh Manjunathbhat Adiga and Talkad Girigowda Shivashankare Gowda, additional judges, are fit and suitable for being appointed as permanent judges," it said.

The resolution said as regards Justice Basavaraja, the collegium is fully in agreement with the recommendation of the High Court collegium and is of the view that he deserves to be appointed as additional judge for a fresh term of one year. *—PTI*

Jairam Ramesh says Amit Shah is lying about drought aid

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The Congress on Thursday termed as an "outright lie" the Centre's claims that the delay in releasing drought funds to Karnataka was because the State dispensation had submitted the proposal three months late, as it accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of indulging in "confrontational federalism".

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said eight months after this issue was first raised, the Modi government is now fabricating stories to defend its inaction.

"In contrast, confrontational federalism is based on creat ing conflict and division, which is the core skill of the Prime Minister and his Home Minister -- as evinced by the home minister's most recent claim," he said. He said 223 of Karnataka's 236 taluks are grappling with the effects of drought, with 123 experiencing severe drought conditions.

PHOTO: PTI

"Karnataka needs Rs 17,900 crore as compensation, and farmers have lost crops worth Rs 35,000 crore. Not a single rupee has been released by the Centre to address this critical situation till date," he said.

"Home Minister Amit Shah now claims that the delay in releasing drought funds was because the state government had submitted the proposal three months late. This is an outright lie: the Karnataka government submitted a proposal for drought relief on 22 September, 2023," he said.

He said that this is the second major example of discrimination against the Kannadigas. *—PTI*

KNOW YOUR MANJUNATHS BEFORE YOU INK

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

As the first phase of nominations filing came to an end on Thursday, Bengaluru Rural constituency saw five Manjunaths throwing their hats into the political ring for Lok Sabha elections. The first phase of elections in the State will be held on 26 April for the Lok Sabha polls.

Dr Manjunath has many namesakes as a competitors in this election. The nearest is Manjunatha CN who is a native of Channarayapatna in Hassan district, whose father's name is Nanjundappa. Dr Manjunath's father's name is Nanjappa. The passport photographs of both these candidates show them in a black blazer and tie. Bahujan Bharat Party fielded Manjunatha CN and he holds a doctorate in social service from Global Human University. However, BJP has alleged that Bahujan Barat Party has issued a fake university certificate and is planning to lodge a complaint with election authorities. Other namesakes are Manjunath K from Papareddypalya in Bengaluru, N Manjunatha from Rajajinagar in Bengaluru and Manjunath C from Shakti Garden in Mudalapalya in Bengaluru. "People are wise, and thoughtful. They know that I am contesting on the lotus symbol from a national party BJP as an NDA candidate," Dr Manjunath said. He ruled out the chances of any confusion that the presence of many namesakes would create among voters.Dr Manjunath is the son-in-law of former prime minister HD Deve Gowda *—Salar News/PTI*

FOOD INFLATION

Households feel the pinch as veggies get pricier

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

Bengaluru's kitchens are feeling the heat again as vegetable prices witness a significant hike. Onions, a staple in most dishes, have reached Rs 27 per kg—up from Rs 23 just a month ago. This price surge isn't limited to onions; tomatoes, beetroot, capsicum, cabbage have also seen a sharp rise, leaving households struggling to manage their budgets.

The reason behind this price hike is the intense heat and deficit rain, which have severely impacted vegetable producing districts like Chikkaballapur, Ramanagara, and Chitradurga.

This disruption in supply has led to a domino effect, pushing prices upwards. Crops like tomatoes, beans, and chillies are particularly susceptible to such conditions which lead to a decline in their availability and a subsequent rise in prices.HOPCOMS, the state-run marketing federation, is also grappling with the situation. Prakash Mirji, managing director of HOPCOMS told Salar News "This is mainly due to the intense heatwave coupled with the delay in monsoon. The yield of vegetables cultivated around Bengaluru is severely affected. Vegetable prices have gone up by 30 to 40% compared to the usual pre-summer rates. While we're trying to ensure some level of price stability through our network of stores, the overall shortage due to the weather patterns is a significant challenge. The monsoon arrival will play a crucial role in stabilizing prices."

—Salar News

The reason behind this price hike is the intense heat and deficit rain, which have severely impacted vegetable producing districts like Chikkaballapur, Ramanagara, and Chitradurga ***PHOTO: PTI***

THE RISE IN VEGGIE PRICES

	BEFORE (4 March)	AFTER (4 April)
Ginger	Rs 93-103	Rs 138-152
Onions	Rs 26-29	Rs 31-34
Tomato	Rs 23	Rs 34
Cabbage	Rs 23-25	Rs 25-28
Capsicum	Rs 55-61	Rs 56-62
Ladies Finger	Rs 44-48	Rs 48-53
Brinjal	Rs 25-28	Rs 31-34

SC allows MP Rana's plea, sets aside HC order

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Supreme Court on Thursday restored the scheduled caste certificate of sitting Amravati MP Navneet Kaur Rana, in a huge last-minute relief that cleared the decks for her to contest the Maharashtra seat reserved for Dalits on a BJP ticket. Pronouncing the order on the last day of nomination for the seat, the apex court set aside the 2021 Bombay High Court verdict on a plea seeking cancellation of her caste certificate dated 30 August 2013 issued by a Mumbai deputy collector who held she belonged to the 'Mochi' caste. Shiv Sena leader Anandrao Adsul had filed a complaint with the Mumbai District Caste Certificate Scrutiny Committee, which had ruled in Rana's favour and validated the certificate. He had then approached the High Court, which ordered the cancellation of Rana's caste certificate. Adsul said she obtained certificate using forged documents.—*PTI*

Delhi excise scam: K Kavitha urges court for bail

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

BRS leader K Kavitha, arrested in the Delhi excise policy scam case, urged a court here on Thursday for interim bail, claiming that her 16-year-old son has exams and needs his mother's "moral and emotional support". The court of Special Judge Kaveri Baweja heard the submissions made by the counsel appearing for Kavitha and the Enforcement Directorate (ED), and reserved its order for Monday. During the hearing, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, who appeared for the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leader, claimed that the perspective of a mother is not substitutable by father, sister or brother. Singhvi said that no immediate interrogation is there that cannot wait these few weeks. ED opposed submission, claiming Kavitha destroyed evidence.—*PTI*

Visit constituencies daily: Kejri's message to MLAs

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has sent a message from Tihar jail asking all AAP MLAs to visit their constituencies daily and ensure that people do not face any problems, his wife Sunita Kejriwal said on Thursday. In a digital briefing, she said Arvind, in his message, said even though he was in jail, the two crore people of Delhi, who are his family, should not face any problems. Arvind on Thursday moved a city court urging it to allow him to spend more time with his lawyer in order to prepare for cases pending against him in several parts of the country. Arvind moved the application claiming that two meetings every week with his lawyer, as permitted by the court, was not sufficient since he was facing multiple cases in various states and needed more time for consultation. He urged the court to increase number of meetings to five per week.—*PTI*

Congress to release manifesto for LS polls today

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

F Top Congress leaders will release the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections on Friday with its focus on the five 'pillars of justice'. The manifesto would be released by Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and former party presidents Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. A day after the launch of the manifesto, Kharge and the Gandhis will address public rallies in Jaipur and Hyderabad where they will also highlight the key elements of the manifesto. In its manifesto, the Congress will lay emphasis on 'Paanch Nyay' or five pillars of justice, including 'Yuva Nyay', 'Naari Nyay', 'Kisaan Nyay', 'Shramik Nyay' and 'Hissedari Nyay' as well as the guarantees made by it to the people as part of its poll promises. —*PTI*

RaGa rally: Oppn sees red over no green flags

CPI(M) alleged that Cong was scared of BJP

Rahul Gandhi's roadshow in Wayanad — *PHOTO: PTI*

T'PURAM/ WAYANAD, 4 APRIL

Congress's decision not to use its or ally Indian Union Muslim League's (IUML) flags in Rahul Gandhi's roadshow in Wayanad has come back to bite it with the BJP and the CPI(M) using the same as an opportunity on Thursday to take political potshots at the grand old party.

While CPI(M) alleged that the flags were not used as the Congress was scared of the BJP, the saffron party claimed it was because Gandhi was ashamed of IUML and asked him to reject its support. Congress on the other hand said CPI(M) and BJP have become close friends and asserted that it does not need any classes f rom anyone on how to carry out a poll campaign. The grand old party also hit back at CPI(M) by saying that it joined INDIA bloc only to ensure that it does not lose its vote share and its party symbol.

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan alleged that the grand old party did not show its and ally IUML's flags during the roadshow as it was scared of BJP. Vijayan also hit out at Gandhi alleging that Congress MP "lacked the courage" to publicly display his own party's flag.

Vijayan said that the Congress wants the votes of the IUML but it is not acknowledging the flag that is important to the League. "Congress has fallen to a level where it is afraid of communal forces," he claimed during a press conference here.

Union Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani was of the view that the IUML flag was not shown as Gandhi was "ashamed" of them. Irani, who was campaigning for the BJP in the hill constituency of Wayanad where Gandhi is seeking a re-election, said if he was ashamed of the IUML, he should reject their support.

Gandhi's roadshow in Wayanad on Wednesday was visibly different from that in 2019 in the constituency when green flags of ally IUML outnumbered the Congress' in the crowd. This time, both the flags were conspicuous by their absence.

He alleged that Congress was choosing to disregard the history behind their flag during such a crucial election in fear of BJP.

Rejecting the allegations, leader of Opposition in the state Assembly VD Satheesan hit back by saying that Vijayan and BJP have become close friends now. Satheesan said that the Congress does not need classes from the CM or anyone else on how to campaign. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

CONGRESS REJECTS SDPI SUPPORT IN KERALA

T'PURAM, 4 APRIL

Congress in Kerala on Thursday rejected the organisational support announced by the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), the political arm of the now-banned PFI, in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections but welcomed individual voters to support UDF.

Addressing media here, Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan said Congress opposes majority and minority communalism.

"We oppose majority and minority communalism. Support offered by SDPI to UDF is being viewed under these circumstances. Each individual can vote according to their wishes. We wish that everyone votes for the UDF but in the case of organisations, this is our stand," Satheesan said.

He refused to elaborate further.

SDPI the political arm of the banned Popular Front of India, had on Monday announced its support to the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in Kerala for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

However, Congress leadership had said that the UDF has not reached any understanding with the SDPI.

Satheesan had then said many parties were extending support to UDF but it has not held any discussions with SDPI nor had reached any understanding. —*PTI*

CONG SPOKESPERSON RESIGNS

Congman quits, says can't be 'anti-Sanatan'

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Congress spokesperson Gourav Vallabh resigned from all posts and membership of the party on Thursday, saying that neither can he raise anti-Sanatan slogans nor abuse 'wealth creators' day in and day out.

Vallabh shared his resignation letter written to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on X. He said he was not feeling comfortable with the directionless way in which the party was moving forward. He had not been attending television programmes on behalf of the party for several months and had not held any press conference for a long time.

In his resignation letter, Vallabh said, "When I joined Congress, I believed that Congress is the oldest party in the country which respects youth and intellectual people and their ideas. But for some time, I felt that the party was not able to adjust with the youth having new ideas."

Gourav Vallabh — *PHOTO: PTI*

Vallabh claimed Congress is completely cut off from the ground and is unable to understand the aspirations of a new India, due to which the party is neither coming to power nor is able to play the role of a strong opposition.

He also said that he was upset with the stance taken by the party of staying away from the Ram Mandir 'Pran Pratishtha' programme in Ayodhya. —*PTI*

'Tremendous arrogance' in Cong leadership: Nirupam

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

A day after being expelled from Congress, former MP Sanjay Nirupam hit out at the grand old party on Thursday and claimed there is "tremendous arrogance" in the party leadership.

Addressing a press conference here, Nirupam further claimed Congress is now history and has no future and that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) is a merger of three "sick units". There are five power centres in the Congress -- the three Gandhi family members, AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge and party General Secretary KC Venugopal, Nirupam said.

"The Nehruvian secularism which has no place for religion in the society has expired," he claimed. The Opposition MVA comprises Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar). Taking note of complaints of indiscipline and anti-party statements, Kharge late Wednesday evening approved Nirupam's expulsion from the party for six years. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF LS POLLS

BJP flays Cong over remarks on Hema Malini

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

BJP on Thursday slammed Congress over its leaders' remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Hema Malini, saying they have lost their "mental balance" and the people of the country will give their party a befitting reply in the Lok Sabha elections.

The reaction came after senior Congress leader Charan Das Mahant, while addressing a rally in Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, called for support for former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel contesting from the Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha seat and said, "We want someone who can hold a stick and bash Narendra Modi's head."

BJP IT department head Amit Malviya on Wednesday shared an undated video, accusing Haryana Congress leader Randeep Surjewala of making "vile, sexist" remarks against BJP MP and candidate Hema Malini. In the video posted by Malviya on X, Surjewala was seen purportedly making some objectionable remarks about the actor-politician while attacking the ruling BJP."In Chhattisgarh, Mahant has once again used the same cheap and objectionable words against Prime Minister Modi. He said that to take on Modi, such a person is needed who can break his head by hitting with a lathi," BJP National Spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said.Address a press conference at the BJP headquarters. Trivedi referred to other such remarks made by Congress leaders against Modi and women so far and asserted that the "people of the country will give a reply to such insults in the Lok Sabha polls".BJP General Secretary Vinod Tawde asked the Congress to make its stand clear on the controversial remarks by its leaders who have shown disrespect towards women and spoken about beating up Modi. —*PTI*

Hema Malini — *PHOTO: PTI*

NCP VS NCP: SC ASKS PAWAR CAMPS TO ABIDE BY ITS ORDER

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Supreme Court on Thursday asked both Sharad Pawar and Ajit Pawar factions of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) to abide by its directions on the use of symbols, party names and disclaimers in publicity material for the Assembly and general elections.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan, while disposing of the applications filed by both sides on non-compliance with its 19 March order, said it is high time that leaders of both factions should be somewhere else and not courts.

It directed the Sharad faction to sensitise party workers on using the name 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' and the symbol 'man blowing turha' (a traditional trumpet also known as tutari) in poll campaigns.

It further directed that the faction led by the veteran leader ask their party workers, leaders, office bearers and lawmakers not to use the 'clock' symbol in poll advertisements, which has been allotted to the Ajit-led bloc of the NCP. —*PTI*

PM sleeping as China entered India, says Cong's Kharge

JAIPUR, 4 APRIL

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday called Prime Minister Narendra Modi the "sardar of liars", also accusing him of "sleeping" while China "entered" Indian territory.

"They are coming inside and you are sleeping. Have you taken sleeping pills? Have they taken opium from the fields of Rajasthan... and fed you?" he said in Hindi. Addressing an election rally in Rajasthan's Chittorgarh, he said Modi does not think of the country and is busy abusing the Gandhi family whose members sacrificed their lives for the nation.

Kharge said the Prime Minister boasts that he has a "56-inch chest" and is not scared. "If you are not afraid then why have you left a large part of our land for China?" he said.

Congress leader slammed Modi over action taken by central agencies against Opposition personalities, claiming that allegedly corrupt leaders are absolved of the charges against them once they switch to the ruling party. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, he said, has a "very big washing machine".

PHOTO: PTI

- ACongress leader slammed Modi over action taken by central agencies against Opposition personalities, claiming that allegedly corrupt leaders are absolved of the charges against them once they switch to the ruling party

"Till the time we had them they were corrupt, after coming to you they became clean within a month," he said about the leaders who joined BJP," he added. Referring to one list of 25 leaders charged with corruption, he claimed legal proceedings against two of them were closed once they joined the BJP and those remaining will be similarly exonerated. —*PTI*

PROBE AGENCIES WORKING FOR PM, SAYS MAMATA

COOCH BEHAR, 4 APRIL

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday accused BJP of not following the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for the Lok Sabha polls and asserted that a poisonous snake can be trusted but not the saffron camp.

Addressing a rally in Cooch Behar, Banerjee alleged that the central investigating agencies, Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) are working at the behest of BJP and urged the Election Commission of India (ECI) to look into it and ensure a level playing field for all political parties.Asserting that her party TMC will not bow before the "threat of central agencies", she urged women in Cooch Behar to file police complaints if "there are instances of BSF torturing locals" ahead of the polls, scheduled for 19 April.BJP only "follows the principle of one nation, one party", Banerjee claimed."It is national shame that a person against whom there are several cases has been appointed as the Minister of State for Home Affairs. He was sacked from our party. Now, he is the asset of BJP," she said in reference to Nisith Pramanik. —*PTI*

NEVER SAY DIE

Independents who refuse to call it quits

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

From appealing people not to vote for them to flaunting the unsuccessful tag, changing name in each election to losing huge sums of money in security deposits -- some tenacious Independent candidates have tried these all but losing elections became a habit for them. Tamil Nadu's **K Padmarajan**, who proudly calls himself the "Election King", might be the only candidate in the election fray who urges people not to vote for him, so he can retain his tag of being "most unsuccessful candidate", a feat also registered in the Limca Book of records. He claims to have lost Rs 80 lakh so far in security deposits which gets forfeited every time he loses an election besides expenses for filing nomination amid fanfare.

Indore's **Parmanand Tolani** is taking forward his father's legacy who fought elections as independent candidate for three decades. "My father passed away in 1988 and I am taking forward his legacy. I have contested 18 elections so far including eight Lok Sabha and eight Vidhan Sabha. My father's wish was that we do not have to stop the trend till someone from the family gets elected," said Tolani.

Vijay Prakash Kodekar from Pune, a retired staffer from state electricity board, has a different agenda behind contesting elections as independent candidate -- advocating zero budget poll campaigns.

He can be seen pushing a steel cart on wheels in streets of Latur. A flex board on the cart says "Main bhi Pradhanmantri". Hyderabad techie Ravinder Uppula, uses different campaign strategies for each Lok Sabha election he fights.

In 2014 -- it was anti-corruption march and in 2019 it was a liquid only fast. "I promise during my campaign that if I get elected, I will get a lie detector test done every 100 days so public who votes for me doesn't feel cheated," he said. **Kaka Joginder Singh**, also known as "Dhartipakad", was a textile-shop owner who contested and lost over 300 elections. He died in 1998. In elections, he always contested independently, and always lost his security deposits.

He earned the nickname Dhartipakad after several unsuccessful runs for the post of the President of India.—*PTI*

K Padmarajan, Parmanand Tolani, Ravinder Uppula and Vijay Prakash Kodekar are amongst leaders flaunting the unsuccesful tag — *PHOTO: PTI*

99% independent candidates lost deposits since 1991

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

As India heads to the 18th general election, data over the years show voters' trust in independent candidates has been diminishing, with more than 99 per cent of independent candidates losing their deposits since 1991.

Data compiled by the Election Commission of India (ECI) show that since independence, even as the number of independent candidates has remained high, numbers of those winning polls have come down from over six per cent in 1951 and eight per cent in 1957, to around 0.11 per cent in 2019.

An independent candidate is one who is not aligned with any recognised party. In the first elections of 1951-52, 533 independent candidates had contested, and 37 of them won, around 6.90 per cent. ECI regulations stipulate that candidates failing to secure a minimum of one-sixth of the total valid votes polled would have their deposits redirected to the treasury.

The security deposit amount was Rs 500 for general candidates and Rs 250 for candidates from SC/ST communities in 1951. The sum has since increased to Rs 25,000 and Rs 12,500 for general and SC/ST candidates.

As India's democracy evolved with several regional parties coming into existence over the years, the number of independent candidates who won kept going down. In 2019, more than 8,000 independent candidates had fought polls, and only four won. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

IAF helicopter makes emergency landing in Ladakh

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

An Apache helicopter of the Indian Air Force made an emergency landing in Ladakh and sustained damage due to undulating terrain and high altitude, the IAF said on Thursday.The incident took place on Wednesday and both the pilots on board are safe, it said. The IAF has ordered a Court of Inquiry into the incident. "An IAF Apache helicopter carried out a precautionary landing during an operational training sortie in Ladakh on 3 April. During the process of this landing, it sustained damage due to undulating terrain and high altitude," the IAF said in a brief statement."Both the pilots on board are safe and have been recovered to the nearest airbase. A Court of Inquiry has been ordered to ascertain the cause," it said.—*PTI*

CISF jawan shoots himself dead at Delhi metro station

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

A constable of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) allegedly shot himself dead at Nagloi Metro Station on Thursday morning. "He was found dead with a gunshot wound on his forehead," officials said, adding that the deceased had allegedly died by suicide. His body was found near a baggage scanning machine installed at the metro station. Officials said that Nangloi Metro Police Station received a call at 7:03am about a 2014 batch constable, identified as Shahre Kishore, being found dead with a gunshot injury mark on his head on the metro station's premises. Following the information, a team of police reached the spot, and the body was later sent for a post-mortem examination. "He (the deceased constable) was found dead at the X-ray machine scanner, committing suicide by gunshot on his forehead. " officials said.—*ANI*

Murmu launches therapy for cancer treatment

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated here on Thursday indigenously-developed CAR T-cell therapy to treat cancer patients. The event was held at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay located in Powai. Developed by the IIT Bombay and the Tata Memorial Centre, this gene-based therapy will help in curing cancer, including different types of blood cancer, officials said. NexCAR19 CAR T-cell therapy is India's first 'Made in India' CAR T-cell therapy, which will significantly bring down the cost of treatment, they said.—*PTI*

T'gana pharma plant explosion death toll rises to 6

HYDERABAD, 4 APRIL

Toll in the explosion in a chemical reactor at a pharmaceutical company's plant in Sangareddy district of Telangana rose to six, police said on Thursday. Four people were killed and 16 others were injured in the blast that occurred at the factory of SB Organics Ltd, located at Chandapur village of Hathnoora mandal of the district on Wednesday. The body of one worker was found under the wreckage in the factory's premises on Thursday and an injured person succumbed while undergoing treatment on Wednesday night, they said. Among the deceased are the firm's director and workers of the unit, they said. The deceased belong to Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh. The blast, triggered fire, which spread through the pharma unit's premises, was subsequently brought under control, Police and Fire department officials had said. —*PTI*

Placements over but 40% IIT students still jobless

Number of unplaced students is far higher in newer IITs

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Around 35-40 per cent of students at the top campuses of the Indian Institute of Technology (IITs) have not been placed so far, even as the first phase of placement concluded at several campus as per data compiled by the Global IIT Alumni Support Group.

The situation at newer IITs like the Indian Institute of Technology, Indore; Indian Institute of Technology, Patna, and Indian Institute of Technology, Bhilai is poorer, where the number of unplaced students is far higher.

This was revealed in data on IIT placements shared by the institute's alumnus and founder of Global IIT Alumni Support Group, Dheeraj Singh.

ANI reached out to the directors of IIT Kanpur, IIT Bombay, IIT Kharagpur and IIT Delhi via mail and phone, however, there was no response to emails and calls till the filing of this report.

Around 30-40 per cent of IIT students are still unplaced in the top-ranked older IITs and around 50-60 per cent students are still unplaced in the newer IITs, as per the data compiled by alumni group.

At IIT Kanpur, approximately 500 students are yet to find employment opportunities PHOTO: PTI

Dheeraj Singh has claimed the salaries offered by the recruiting companies have dipped substantially from crore plus packages in phase one to barely Rs 3-4 lakh per annum currently.

"These large numbers of unplaced students are dealing with a high level of stress and anxiety staring at bleak future prospects due to poor job placement scenario in their colleges as reported by 40 per cent of the students in our emotional health survey we recently undertook" he said.

At Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, which holds the top rank among Indian colleges, 900 students from the renowned institute are still awaiting placement opportunities, Dheeraj said.

At Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, which holds the second position in national rankings, around 900 students are still awaiting job offers out of a total of 2,000 registered candidates. Similarly, at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay (IIT Bombay), which holds the third position, a substantial 46 per cent of students, accounting for 1,100 individuals, remain unplaced out of 2,400 registered students.

At IIT Kanpur, approximately 500 students are yet to find employment opportunities, while at IIT Kharagpur, a staggering 52 per cent of students, totalling 1,385 individuals, await placement, as per the data provided by Dheeraj.

"This is a very disheartening state of affairs for the top young talents of our country, IITs should help unplaced students in finding a job. This is a serious matter considering large number of IIT student suicides in the recent past. Clearly, our economy is not producing enough jobs for youth and we are heading towards greater unemployment and economic inequality which is a worrisome trend," Dheeraj Singh said. —*ANI*

IN 2021

Covid-19 was 2nd leading cause of death globally

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Covid-19 replaced stroke to become the second-leading cause of death globally in 2021, causing 94 deaths per one lakh population and slashing life expectancy by 1.6 years, an international research published in The Lancet journal has found.

Disrupting more than three decades of consistent improvements in life expectancy and deaths, Covid -19 reversed this long-standing progress to emerge as "one of the most defining global health events of recent history," researchers said.

In 2020, deaths around the world rose by 10.8 per cent compared to 2019, and in 2021, they rose by 7.5 per cent relative to 2020. Death rates too followed a similar trend,

rising by 8.1 per cent in 2020 and an additional 5.2 per cent in 2021, the study estimated.

Globally, Covid -19 and related deaths were responsible for slashing life expectancy by 1.6 years between 2019 and 2021, even as reduced deaths from infections, stroke, and of newborns, among others, had helped steadily enhance life expectancy between 1990 and 2019, the researchers found.

India lost 1.9 years of life expectancy due to Covid -19, resulting in a net gain of 7.9 years of life expectancy between 1990 and 2021, the study showed.

" Covid -19 had a pronounced influence on the reduction in global life expectancy that occurred," the authors wrote.

The researchers forming the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) Causes of Death Collaborators estimated mortality and years of life lost from 288 causes of death across 204 countries and territories for every year from 1990 until 2021.

Region-wise, death rates from Covid -19 were the highest in the sub-Saharan Africa.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, it was at 271 per one lakh population and almost 200 deaths per one lakh population, respectively.

The rate was the lowest in southeast Asia, east Asia, and Oceania at around 23 deaths per one lakh population, the researchers estimated. —*PTI*

BORDER ISSUE

India's position on PoK not of 1 party but of whole nation: EAM

T'PURAM, 2 APRIL

Reaffirming India's stand that Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) is an integral part of India, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that this is not just the Bharatiya Janata Party's position but that of the whole country.

He further said that the prime concern regarding Pakistan is that of terrorism, and if anything unruly happens, it will be given a firm response.

"On the issue of PoK, there is a national position and not the party's position. The Parliament of India has taken a united stand and every political party in the country has supported that stand. We will never accept that the PoK is not a part of India. It's a united stand, it remains our stand," Jaishankar said addressing a press conference in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday.

EAM S Jaishankar says Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir PoK has always been an integral part of India PHOTO: ANI

"The central issue where Pakistan is concerned is terrorism, and on the terrorism issue, we as a party and the government have been very clear that we will not ignore terrorism and won't look away when terrorism happens. If something happens, we will deal with it, we will reply and that has been our record," he added.On being asked about the relation with China, the Foreign Minister acknowledged that the relationship is challenging, but affirmed that India will compete in a competitive way.Jaishankar also refuted any doubts regarding India's relation with its neighbours, adding that there might be "forces" inside India and in the neighbourhood "who want to create problems."He further said that barring Pakistan and China, India's relationship with the neighbourhood is much better that it has been for a long time. —*ANI*

Navy hands over 9 pirates from Somalia to police

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

All nine pirates involved in piracy were apprehended on Wednesday after Indian Navy ships INS Trishul and INS Sumedha conducted successful anti-piracy operations east of Somalia on 29 March.

The operations resulted in the rescue of FV Al Kambar and its crew of 23 Pakistani nationals.

In an official post on X, the Indian Navy said, Robust actions by #IndianNavy ships Trishul & Sumedha during #antipiracy ops East of Somalia on #29Mar 24 had resulted in the successful rescue of FV Al Kambar & its crew of 23 Pakistani nationals. All nine pirates involved in piracy were apprehended for further transit to India."

"INS Trishul arrived in Mumbai on 3 April and handed over all nine pirates to the local police for further legal action by the Indian laws, specifically the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act 2022," Indian Navy added.

Indian Navy reaffirms its resolve to safeguard all merchant shipping and seafarers transiting in IOR irrespective of their nationality.

The rescue unfolded in the early hours of 29 March, 2024, when the Indian Navy warship INS Sumedha intercepted the hijacked vessel, FV Al-Kambar, as it was being held captive by pirates.

Acting swiftly, INS Sumedha was soon joined by the guided missile frigate INS Trishul to bolster the operation. —*ANI*

ELEPHANT TRAMPLES 2 TO DEATH IN T'GANA

KUMURAM BHEEM ASIFABAD, 4 APRIL

Two people were killed after being attacked by a wild elephant in Telangana's Kumuram Bheem (KB) Asifabad district in less than 24 hours, officials said on Thursday.

According to police, the wild elephant entered an agricultural field and killed a person in Chintala Manepally in Kouthala Mandal on Wednesday afternoon. On Thursday morning, another person was also killed by the tusker in Penchikalpet Mandal.

Confirming the deaths, Sadik Pasha, an inspector with Kouthala Police, said, "The forest department officials are searching for the elephant."

Forest department officials have cordoned off the areas to prevent the wild elephant from entering the village and said that efforts to trace the tusker were ongoing. —*ANI*

30 detained for 'smuggling' flee Lucknow airport

LUCKNOW, 4 APRIL

Thirty people who were detained at the Lucknow airport for allegedly smuggling gold into the country escaped after one of them pretended to fall sick and created chaos, officials said.

Customs and police officials have launched a search operation to nab the accused, they said.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Shashank Singh said officials of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence and the Customs Department on Monday stopped 36 passengers from Sharjah at the Chaudhary Charan Singh Airport here.

When the officials frisked them, cigarettes worth more than Rs 3 crore and cash worth Rs 23.90 lakh were seized from some of them, Singh said.

Six of the passengers told officials that they were carrying gold, he said.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

- Six of the passengers told officials that they were carrying gold, he said

On Tuesday, when the remaining 30 passengers were being questioned, one of them pretended to be ill and created chaos. Taking advantage of this, all of them fled, the officer said.A case has been registered under relevant sections on the complaint in the matter and efforts are being made to arrest the accused, he added. —*ANI*

FOREST STAFFER SUSPENDED OVER ANTI-EVM WHATSAPP MESSAGE

CHANDRAPUR, 4 APRIL

A forest department staffer in Yavatmal district of Maharashtra has been suspended for allegedly violating the model code of conduct by keeping a WhatsApp status message that raised question marks over the efficacy of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), an official said on Thursday.

The action was taken against Shivshankar More, posted at Pandhrakawda, saidChandrapur Collector and District Returning Officer Vinay Gowda said.Assistant Election Officer at Arni, which falls under the Chandrapur Lok Sabha constituency, in a letter to Divisional Forest Officer (Wildlife) Pandharkawda, said they received a complaint against More. —*PTI*

Saudi sends back smuggler under Interpol scanner

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

A wanted accused in the National Investigation Agency (NIA's) gold smuggling case, facing an Interpol Red Notice, was repatriated from Saudi Arabia in an operation coordinated by the CBI, officials said on Thursday.

The Global Operations Centre of the Central Bureau of Investigation has coordinated via Interpol channels with the National Central Bureau-Riyadh for the return of Shokat Ali to Mumbai from Saudi Arabia on Wednesday night, the CBI spokesperson said.

Ali was wanted by the NIA in a gold smuggling case registered in 2020 related to the seizure of smuggled gold bars at Jaipur International Airport, Rajasthan.

"During investigation it had been found that accused Shokat Ali had conspired with his co-accused in illegal smuggling of gold bars from Saudi Arabia into India," the official said.

He was booked under stringent provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) pertaining to offences of unlawful activities and criminal conspiracy and was earlier geo-located in Saudi Arabia with close follow-up through Interpol, he said.

PHOTO: PTI

- The CBI got a Red Notice issued against him from the Interpol General Secretariat on 13 September, 2021

The CBI got a Red Notice issued against him from the Interpol General Secretariat on 13 September, 2021. The Red Notice was circulated to all Interpol member countries to locate and arrest the accused, the spokesperson said in a statement. —*PTI*

NEW GEN NUCLEAR MISSILE

India's successfully launches 'Agni Prime'

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

India has successfully carried out a night launch of new generation nuclear capable ballistic missile 'Agni Prime' from the Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha, boosting the country's strategic deterrence capability.

The defence ministry said the test-flight was carried out on Wednesday evening and it met all the trial objectives, validating the reliable performance, as confirmed from the data captured by a number of range sensors deployed at different locations.

The Strategic Forces Command (SFC), along with Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), carried out the flight test of the missile that has a strike range of 1,000 to 2,000km.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO, SFC and the armed forces for the successful test flight and stated that the successful development and induction of the missile will be an excellent force multiplier for the military.

Missile Agni-Prime being successfully flight-tested from the APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha, on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

"Strategic Forces Command (SFC), along with the DRDO, conducted the successful flight-test of new generation ballistic missile Agni-Prime from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha at around 1900 hours on 3 April," the ministry said.

"The test met all the trial objectives validating its reliable performance, as confirmed from the data captured by a number of range sensors deployed at different locations, including two down-range ships placed at the terminal point," it said.

Last month, India successfully carried out the first flight test of indigenously developed Agni-5 missile with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) under its 'Mission Divyastra'.

By carrying out the test, India joined a select group of nations having such a capability. The MIRV feature ensures that a single missile can deploy multiple war heads at different locations.

Agni-V missile has a range of up to 5,000km and it can bring almost the entire Asia, including the northernmost part of China as well as some regions in Europe under its striking range.

The Agni 1 to 4 missiles have ranges from 700km to 3,500km and they have already been deployed.

In June last year, India successfully carried out the night launch of the 'Agni Prime.'

In April last year, India successfully carried out the maiden flight trial of an endo-atmospheric interceptor missile from a ship off the coast of Odisha in the Bay of Bengal as part of its ambitious ballistic missile defence programme.

The purpose of the trial of the sea-based missile was to engage and neutralise a hostile ballistic missile threat thereby elevating India into an elite club of nations having such a capability.

India has been developing capabilities to intercept hostile ballistic missiles both inside and outside the earth's atmospheric limits. —*PTI*

THE MIGRANTS

Migrants stand in front of the Paris City Hall in France. French police has removed about 50 migrants, including families with young children, from the Paris City Hall plaza as the capital prepares to mark 100 days to the start of the Olympic Games.
PHOTO: PTI

The danger of humanitarian work in conflict zones

President Joe Biden said he was "outraged" by the Israeli military's attacks that killed seven World Central Kitchen aid workers traveling in three vehicles in Gaza on 2 April, and called for Israel to conduct a swift investigation into the strikes. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he "deeply regrets" the mistake and that Israel would undertake an investigation. World Central Kitchen, one of the few international aid groups operating in Gaza, announced shortly after the attack that it would suspend its operations in Gaza.

This attack was not, as Biden pointed out in his remarks, a "stand-alone incident." More than 180 other aid workers have been killed since the start of the Israeli invasion in October 2023, according to the United Nations. Most of them were Palestinians working with the United Nations.

More broadly, attacks on aid workers in many wars, including those in Syria, Mali, Myanmar and Afghanistan, have been on the rise since the late 1990s, according to the non-profit group Aid Worker Security Database. In 2023, 237 aid workers were killed, kidnapped or wounded, marking a sharp rise from the 35 humanitarians who faced the same fate in 1997.

Overall, the targeting of aid workers has expanded in war. But there are also many more aid workers than there used to be, and we are delivering aid in different ways.

Increasingly, in a lot of conflicts, like in Gaza, fighting is taking place within cities, where civilians live and where aid workers are based. There have also been rising numbers of attacks on hospitals, schools, internal displacement camps for civilians and other civilian places, which are supposed to be protected, humanitarian spaces.

A humanitarian space is used primarily by civilians and is a place that, according to international law, should not be targeted during a war. All of this has been thrown out the window in the context of Gaza, where hospitals have been directly targeted and destroyed.

Attacks on aid workers in wars, including those in Syria, Mali, Myanmar and Afghanistan, have been on the rise since the late 1990s
PHOTO: WORLD CENTRAL KITCHEN HANDOUT

There is also the idea that aid workers are meant to be neutral and able to do their jobs without political interference, with the goal of saving lives and livelihoods. This idea of true objectivity is almost a utopian idea. In the Afghanistan War, for example, aid was funded by the US, which was a party to the conflict. From the Taliban's perspective, this wasn't neutral; this was US aid, and the US was one of the fighting forces.

There are only a few organizations, such as Doctors Without Borders and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which make staying out of conflict politics their modus operandi – and even they struggle. In Gaza, aid is completely politicized in terms of where food or medical supplies goes, who is taking it in and how it gets there. This makes it incredibly difficult for aid workers to do their job and for civilians to get what they need to survive.

Aid workers are attacked in a lot of places, but the amount of attention this receives differs greatly based on the nationality of the aid workers in question. In 13 years of conflict in Syria, relatively few foreign aid workers have been killed, because most foreign donors are not willing to risk having their citizens in these places. Instead, the international organizations operate remotely, meaning it is local staff from national organizations delivering the aid and, as a result, taking the risks.

In a situation like Gaza, there would have been multiple levels of conversation and security protocols, likely starting with the aid workers themselves. After they finished unloading their trucks, they would likely have radioed their security officer to check if they were good to go. That security officer would then talk to his or her official Israeli military contacts, as well as with any local sources, to make sure it was safe.

It sounds like the World Central Kitchen workers were in direct contact with IDF and had clearance from them to travel. The World Central Kitchen workers were traveling along one of Israel's preapproved aid delivery routes. We know that they were in clearly marked vehicles and were targeted anyway – whether it was intentional or not remains to be seen.

These attacks are increasingly routine, unfortunately, in war. There have been more than 180 local aid workers killed since the start of the conflict.

Possibly the fact that some of these World Central Kitchen workers were from influential countries like Australia, the United Kingdom and the US may turn up the heat on the Israeli military and shine a spotlight on this – but I think it will fade relatively quickly.

Israel has also come out and said it was a mistake. That is an interesting aspect to follow, and we will see if that results in maybe a brief expansion of humanitarian space to allow better access to civilians, to encourage international aid groups to come back to Gaza.

Courtesy, The Conversation

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR ساڈا

Risks and benefits of weight-loss drug Ozempic

After weight-loss drugs like Ozempic exploded onto the market, celebrities and social media influencers were quick to spruik their benefits, leading to their rapid rise in use. In the last three months of 2022, clinicians in the United States alone wrote more than nine million prescriptions for these drugs.

As they've grown in popularity, we've also heard more about the potential side effects – from common gastrointestinal discomforts, to more serious mental health concerns.

Potential benefits

1) It's likely to help you lose weight

The largest, well-conducted research study of semaglutide was from United Kingdom in 2021. Some 1,961 people who were classified as "overweight" or "obese" were randomly assigned to have either semaglutide or a placebo and followed for 68 weeks (about 1.3 years). All participants also had free access to advice about healthy eating and physical activity.

The study found those taking semaglutide lost weight – significantly more than people who had the placebo (-14.9 per cent of their body weight compared with -2.4per cent of body weight).

In another study in the United States, one healthcare clinic gave 408 people weekly injections of semaglutide. Over the first three months, those included in the final analysis (175 people) lost an average of 6.7kg. Over the first six months, they lost an average of 12.3kg.

2) It may reduce your chronic disease risk factors

When people in the overweight or obese weight categories lose at least 5per cent of their body weight, physiological changes often occur beyond a change in weight or shape. This might include lowered cholesterol levels, lowered blood pressure and lowered blood glucose levels, which all reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

3) It might improve your quality of life, emotional wellbeing or sense of achievement

The original trial of semaglutide did not focus on this bundle of benefits, but further follow-ups show additional benefits associated with the medication. Compared to the placebo, people taking semaglutide saw significant improvements in their physical functioning and perceptions of their general health, social functioning and mental health.

What about the risks?

1) You may experience gastrointestinal symptoms

In the US clinical trial, nearly half (48.6per cent) of people taking semaglutide reported experiencing adverse effects. Nausea and vomiting were the most frequently experienced (36.6per cent) followed by diarrhea (8.6per cent), fatigue (6.3per cent) and constipation (5.7per cent).

Most gastrointestinal symptoms were mild to moderate in severity.

2) You might feel fatigued

Fatigue was the second most common side effect for participants in the US clinical trial, affecting 6.3per cent of participants.

3) You might be among the minority who don't tolerate the drug

In the US clinical trial, no unexpected safety issues were reported. However, five patients (2.9per cent) had to stop taking the medication because they could not tolerate the adverse effects. Fifteen (8.6per cent) had to either reduce the dose or remain on the same dose to avoid the adverse effects.

Due to the severity and fatal outcomes of some of these reports, the US Food and Drug Administration investigated further but did not find evidence that use of these medicines caused suicidal thoughts or actions.

4) It might be difficult to access

Despite being considered safe, the TGA has warned significant Ozempic access barriers are likely to continue throughout 2024.

To manage the shortage, pharmacists are instructed to give preference to people with type 2 diabetes who are seeking the medication.

5) You might not always get clear information from vested interests

Given the popularity of Ozempic and Wegovy, health organisations such as the World Obesity Federation have expressed concern about the medication's marketing, PR and strong social media presence.Some journalists have raised conflict of interest concerns about the relationship between some obesity researchers and Novo Nordrisk, Ozempic and Wegovy's manufacturer. The worry is that researchers might be influenced by their relationship with Novo Nordrisk to produce study results that are more favourable to the medications.

Ozempic is a medication that should be used in conjunction with your health care provider.

But remember, weight is only one aspect of your health and wellbeing. It's important to take a holistic view of your health and prioritise eating well, moving more and getting enough sleep.

Courtesy, The Conversation

In the last three months of 2022, clinicians in the United States wrote more than nine million prescriptions for the wight-loss drugs
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Quirky takes from '57 polls: Voter offering prayers to ballot box

In the second Lok Sabha polls, a voter in erstwhile Madras had refused to exercise his franchise in favour of any person except the then chief election commissioner (CEC) Sukumar Sen, saying various parties in the fray had been "harassing" him with their "election propaganda".

Sen, the first CEC, had led the Election Commission of India (ECI) team in successfully conducting the maiden general elections after Independence in 1951-52 and the massive democratic exercise in 1957.

According to an official report on the second general elections of 1957, some "unusual incidents" took place on polling days which went on to add an "element of humour to an otherwise prosaic and serious proceeding".

While India had successfully pulled off the 'The Great Experiment' as the first Lok Sabha polls were dubbed, an independent nation and its democracy were still in their infancy, with a literacy rate low when the country went to the polls for the second time.

Come 2024, EC is all geared up for the 18th Lok Sabha polls with the gargantuan seven-phase electoral exercise set to begin from 19 April.

According to the report on the 1957 elections by the Commission, colourful incidents had come to light from different parts of the country, from a voter in a backward district regarding a ballot box almost as an "object of veneration" to wild animals visiting some polling stations, making the overall electorate exercise anything but drab.

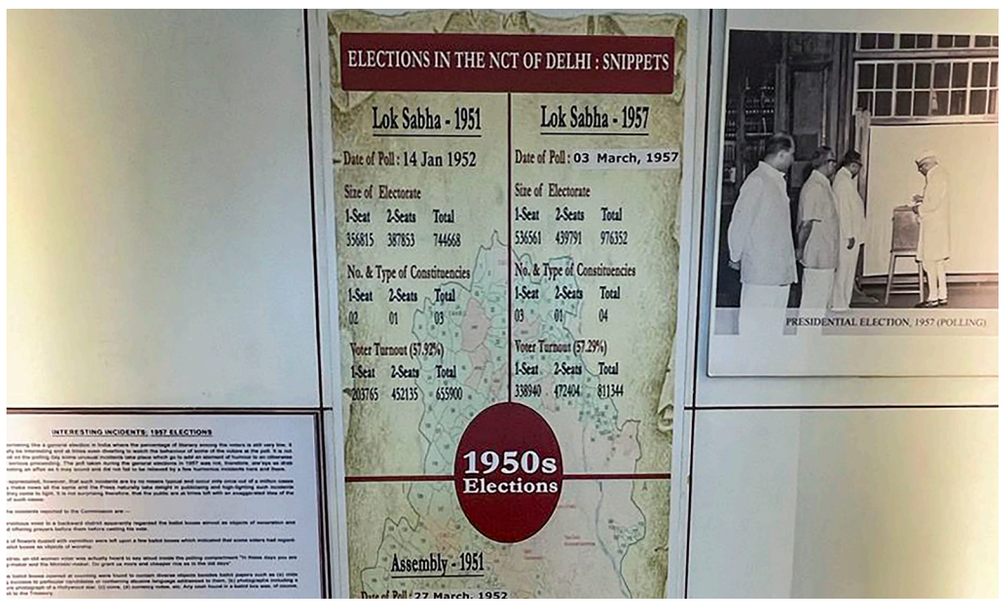
In another quirky incident during the 1957 polls, a candidate had filed his nomination paper in the New Delhi parliamentary constituency, describing himself therein by the name of "Lord Jesus Christ".

"He failed to deposit any security, however. The nomination paper was naturally rejected by the returning officer at the time of scrutiny," the report said. An excerpt from this report, listing some of these "interesting incidents", has been displayed in a panel at a poll museum in Delhi.

"It would be appreciated, however, that such incidents are by no means typical and occur only once out of a million cases or so," the report said.

One incident pertained to a voter in Madras who wanted to exercise his franchise only in favour of Sen, the then CEC who was conducting the polls.

"The voter is said to have remarked, 'I want to vote for Sen only and not for the candidate of any of the parties. All these parties have been harassing me with their election propaganda for over a month'," the report said, quoting the incident.



Data related to Lok Sabha polls held in the 1950s displyed on a panel at a poll museum in New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

The 1957 general elections were the first such exercise after the reorganisation of various states post-independence.

After the enactment of the States Reorganisation Act, of 1956 by Parliament, new states were formed as a result of the reorganisation -- Andhra Pradesh, Bombay, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Mysore, Punjab and Rajasthan.

The Bombay State was further reorganised into the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat with effect from 1 May, 1960, while the Madras State was officially renamed Tamil Nadu in 1969.

In the second Lok Sabha polls, there were 1,519 contestants for 494 seats, according to an official statement issued by the government in 2014, citing data from EC.

In the 1957 polls, the electorate size was over 193 million, up from 173 million electors in the country's first-ever parliamentary election after independence for 489 seats.

According to a statistical report on 1957 polls by the ECI, the voter turnout in the second Lok Sabha polls stood at 45.44 per cent.

The official report on the second Lok Sabha polls also mentioned that a "superstitious voter in a backward district apparently regarded the ballot boxes almost as objects of veneration and was found offering prayers before them before casting his vote".

Besides, petals of flowers "dusted with vermilion" were left upon a few ballot boxes which indicated that some voters had regarded the ballot boxes as "objects of worship," it said.

"In Madras, an old woman voter was actually heard to say aloud inside the polling compartment - 'In these days, you are the kingmaker and the minister-maker. Do grant us more and cheaper rice as in the old days'," the report mentioned.

Among other unusual incidents, it has chronicled how some ballot boxes opened during the counting process, were found to contain "diverse objects" besides ballot papers, such as "chits wishing success to particular candidates or containing abusive language addressed to them" or photographs including a "miniature photograph of a Hollywood star" or "coins, currency notes".

"Any cash found in a ballot box was, of course, credited to the Treasury," it said.

The report also documents some of the unexpected visitors who turned up at polling stations during the 1957 elections.

"Even wild animals appear to have taken an active interest in the novel and unusual activities going on in connection with the poll. At some out-of-the-way polling stations, they were apparently driven by curiosity to approach the scene of these activities and watch the fun," it said.

In Andhra Pradesh, a "panther visited a polling station" at about midnight on the night before the poll.

"Next day, when the polling party was returning to headquarters after the poll at about dusk, a tiger said to be about ten feet in length, stood barring their way and staring hard at the party barely ten yards from their jeep. After an uncomfortable five minutes or so, the party was relieved to see the tiger move away," it added.A tiger entered one of the polling stations in Madhya Pradesh the night before the poll and tried to carry away a man sleeping there by his leg until the big cat was scared away, the report said.

—PTI

PHOTO: ANI

Taiwan detects 7 Chinese vessels, 3 military aircraft

TAIPEI, 4 APRIL

The Ministry of National Defence (MND) tracked seven Chinese naval vessels and three military aircraft around Taiwan between 6 am on Wednesday and 6 am on Thursday, reported Taiwan News. "3 PLA aircraft and 7 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 a.m. (UTC+8) today. #ROCArmedForces have monitored the situation and employed appropriate forces to respond," Taiwan Ministry of National Defence posted. According to MND, of the three People's Liberation Army aircraft, none crossed the Taiwan Strait median line or entered the southwest corner of the country's air defence identification zone. In response, Taiwan sent aircraft and naval ships and deployed air defence missile systems to monitor PLA activity. *—ANI*

Pak Prez rejects 'baseless' claims against Army

ISLAMABAD, 4 APRIL

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has voiced his grave concern about the "baseless and unsubstantiated" allegations levelled by a specific political party and its few individuals against the Army for their political interests. Zardari made the veiled jibe at jailed former prime minister Imran Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party when Chief of Army Staff Gen Asim Munir called on the new President on Wednesday. During the meeting, the Army chief also extended felicitations to Zardari on his appointment as the 14th President of Pakistan last month. An official press release issued by the Presidency said, President Zardari noted with "grave concern the baseless allegations levelled by a specific political party and its few individuals against the institution and its leadership to accrue narrow political interests and resolved to deal with such disruptive elements with an iron hand". *—PTI*

Imran Khan's PTI cancels 6 April protest

ISLAMABAD, 4 APRIL

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has announced the cancellation of its much-hyped public gathering, poised to be held at Parade Ground in Islamabad on 6 April, Geo News reported. In a post on X, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan said on Wednesday the decision had been taken in view of the Laylat-ul-Qadr--the blessed night that Muslims seek in the odd-numbered nights of the last ten days of Ramadan. He also urged supporters to pray for the release and safety of all party workers and leaders including PTI founder Imran Khan and his spouse, Bushra Bibi. *—ANI*

'China played imp role in fostering of Buddhism globally'

BEIJING, 4 APRIL

China has held a major conference of influential Asian Buddhist monks where its top monk has affirmed that Beijing has played a "pivotal role" in the promotion of Buddhism globally. The conference on Buddhism was part of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference held in Boao, Hainan province in the last week of March. In this year's forum, the Chinese Buddhist monks held an interactive session organised for the first time with their counterparts from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Japan, Vietnam, Cambodia and South Korea, according to a report from the official media here. In recent decades, the ruling Communist Party of China has permitted the Sinicised or Chinese version of Buddhism to be practised at home after the crackdown on Buddhist temples. *—PTI*

Israel's cyber body warns of attacks from Iran

The threat is being organised under hashtag #OpJerusalem

TEL AVIV, 4 APRIL

Israel's National Cyber Directorate warns of an increase in attacks for the purposes of consciousness ahead of the Iranian Jerusalem Day that will be celebrated this Friday, 5 April.

The Directorate said that this year, against the background of the "Iron Swords" war against Hamas in Gaza, the hostile discourse on the Internet increased and called for cyber-attacks against the Israeli organisations and people on the Internet.

The threat from Iran is being organised under the hashtag #OpJerusalem, planned for 5 April, and #OpIsrael, planned for 7 April, which call on people from around the world to attack Israel on these days.

The Directorate predicts that there may be an increase in attacks on websites, attacks that disrupt services and the spread of false information.

It is predictec that there may be increase in attacks on websites *PHOTO: PTI*

The Iranian Jerusalem Day takes place every year on the last Friday of the month of Ramadan and is characterised by demonstrations throughout Iran, the Palestinian Authority as well as anti-Israel offensive activity in cyberspace.

- The threat from Iran is being organised under the hashtag #OpJerusalem, planned for 5 April, and #OpIsrael, planned for 7 April, which call on people from around the world to attack Israel on these days

Every year during this period, attacks are identified, often less sophisticated and of the type that is easier to carry out on a wide scale, such as defacing websites, taking over smart home systems, distributing text messages containing phishing messages, hacking into social networks, infiltrating company databases and information leaks, alongside publications that boast of attacks which did not necessarily occur. *—ANI*

UK should end arms sales to Israel: Experts

LONDON, 4 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

British sales are lower than those of other countries, including Germany and Italy, and dwarfed by the billions supplied by its largest arms supplier, the United States.

But a UK ban would add diplomatic and political pressure on Israel, at a time when its conduct in the Gaza conflict is coming under renewed international scrutiny. Former Supreme Court president Lady Hale is among more than 600 lawyers, academics and retired senior judges who have signed a 17-page letter.

It says "serious action" is needed to "avoid UK complicity in grave breaches of international law, including potential violations of the Genocide Convention". It adds that the sale of arms and weapons systems to Israel "falls significantly short" of the government's obligations under international law, given the "plausible risk of genocide" in Gaza - which the letter said was highlighted in a provisional judgement issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in January - and the worsening humanitarian situation since.

Other signatories include former Supreme Court justices Lord Sumption and Lord Wilson, along with nine other judges and 69 senior barristers. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, Lord Sumption emphasised the importance the provisional ruling from the UN's highest court should have on UK policy, even though the ICJ's final ruling has not yet been issued. "It seems to me that if you have a duty, as we do, to prevent genocide - and there is a plausible case that is what is happening - you should do what you can to obstruct it," he said. The former Supreme Court judge added that the "framework of international law around war" does not mean countries can act however they want, even if they have been provoked or attacked, "however outrageously". *—BBC News*

Myanmar's military-ruled capital attacked by drones

NAYPYIDAW, 4 APRIL

Thursday morning's attack on the capital marks another bold, and rare incursion by the resistance groups who are mounting an increasingly effective opposition to the junta.

Representatives from the NUG told BBC Burmese they had planned and strategised with several defence groups to conduct this operation. "The synchronised drone operations were simultaneously executed against Nay Pyi Taw targeting both the military headquarters... and Alar air base," NUG's deputy secretary Mg Mg Swe said.

The NUG, which calls itself Myanmar's government in exile, has earlier this year claimed that more than 60% of the country's territory was now under the control of resistance forces. Before Thursday's attack, the regime was seen to have suffered its most serious setback last October.

The Junta has also lost large areas of territory to insurgents along the Bangladesh and Indian borders.

The fierce fighting pushed the junta to enforce mandatory conscription in February - where men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 - would be forced to enlist. Observers have said the enforcement of the law reveals the junta's diminishing grip on the country. *—BBC News*

So far no casualties reported *PHOTO: THE THAIGER*

Thailand: People jump into sea to escape ferry fire

BANGKOK, 4 APRIL

Panicked passengers jumped into the sea to escape a raging ferry fire in the Gulf of Thailand early Thursday, and all 108 people on board were safe. The overnight ferry from Surat Thani province was about to arrive at Koh Tao, a popular tourist destination off the Thai coast, when one of the passengers suddenly heard a crackling sound and smelled smoke. Maitree Promjampa said he saw billowing smoke and fire less than five minutes later, and that was when people started shouting and rang the alarm.

"We could barely get the life vests in time," he told The Associated Press. "It was chaotic. People were weeping ... I also teared up." Of the 108 people on the ferry, 97 were passengers, Surat Thani officials said on Facebook. The province's public relations department posted that everyone was rescued with no casualties.

Videos showed people hurrying out of the ferry's cabin while putting on life vests, as thick black smoke swept across the ferry. It was later engulfed in fire.

Maitree, a Surat Thani resident who often travels to Koh Tao for work, said several boats came to their rescue around 20 minutes after they called for help, but the boats could not get close to the ferry out of fear of explosions. He said people had to jump into the sea to be rescued. Videos showed the ferry was also carrying several vehicles. *—AP*

4 KILLED, 12 INJURED

Russia targets Kharkiv with drone

The strike killed four people and wounded 12 *PHOTO: PTI*

KYIV, 4 APRIL

Russian troops launched waves of Shahed drones against the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv overnight, killing four people and wounding 12, regional Gov Oleh Syniehubov said Thursday.

Russia attacked Ukraine's second-biggest city with at least 15 drones, some of which were shot down by air defence. Three rescuers were killed when Russia struck a multistory building damaged in an earlier strike. Six people were wounded at that location. Another 14-story building was hit by a drone, killing a 69-year-old woman. Kharkiv has become a frequent target for Russian troops in recent weeks. The eastern city is close to the border with Russia and has been hit with both ballistic missiles and drones.

A recent massive missile attack that aimed to significantly damage Ukraine's energy infrastructure plunged most of Kharkiv into darkness, and the situation there is still being stabilized. *—AP*

Russia's neighbours ask for NATO military aid

MOSCOW, 4 APRIL

"We're practising for any threat," he says.

"We're ready for anything that comes to Estonia and we're ready to defend the country." Toivo, from the capital Tallinn, is among the current crop of young Estonians undergoing their military service - a duty all men over 18 are asked to carry out. For women, it's voluntary.

As the Cold War ended, and relations with post-Soviet Russia warmed in the 1990s, conscription appeared consigned to history in many parts of Europe.

But not in Estonia, where it would have been impossible for the collective pain of occupation and deportation to have faded away.

And now, following President Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, conscription is being rebooted and expanded across Europe, with those living on Russia's doorstep urging their Nato allies further afield, including the UK, to follow suit.

This week Norway announced it was increasing the number of conscripted soldiers after Denmark said last month it intends to extend conscription to women and increase the duration of service.

"It takes a toll on you," says a drenched Toivo, explaining that the training has been the toughest experience of his life. "But in the end, it's service for your country. Being prepared for anything is better than kind of sneaking off and trying to evade this service."

"They are fighting for their lives." Standing more than 2m tall, the 38-year-old has a natural advantage when it comes to surveying the progress of his new intake. *—BBC News*

DEATH TOLL RISES TO 10

Taiwan quake: Rescue Op underway

HUALIEN, 4 APRIL

A structural engineer takes samples from a leaning building a day after a powerful earthquake struck, in Hualien City, eastern Taiwan *PHOTO: PTI*

Rescuers searched on Thursday for dozens of people still missing a day after Taiwan's strongest earthquake in a quarter century damaged buildings, killed 10 people and left others stranded in remote areas.

In the eastern coastal city of Hualien near the epicentre, workers used an excavator to stabilise the base of a damaged building with construction materials as officials took samples of its exterior and chickens pecked among potted plants on its slanted roof.

Mayor Hsu Chen-wei said 48 residential buildings were damaged in Wednesday's quake, some of which were tilting at precarious angles with their ground floors crushed.

Some Hualien residents were staying in tents, and the main road linking the county to the capital, Taipei, was still closed Thursday afternoon, but much of Taiwan's day-to-day life was returning to normal.

Some local rail service to Hualien resumed, and Taiwan Semiconductor Manu facturing Co, one of the world's most important manufacturers of computer chips, restarted most operations, the Central News Agency reported. *—AP*

Earthquake of magnitude 6.1 strikes Japan

TOKYO, 4 APRIL

An earthquake of 6.1 magnitude struck Japan's northern coast of Honshu on Thursday morning, the National Centre of Seismology said.

The depth of the earthquake was 55 km which struck Japan at 8:46 am IST. "Earthquake of Magnitude:6.1, Occurred on 04-04-2024, 08:46:33 IST, Lat: 37.77 & Long: 141.70, Depth: 55 Km ,Location: Near East Coast of Honshu, Japan," the NCS posted on X.. No casualties were reported in the incident. This comes after Japan downgraded its tsunami warning to tsunami advisory following a powerful earthquake of magnitude 7.4 that struck Taiwan a day ago. *—ANI*

LIKE NEVER BEFORE

Total Solar Eclipse: How will it help scientists to study the Sun

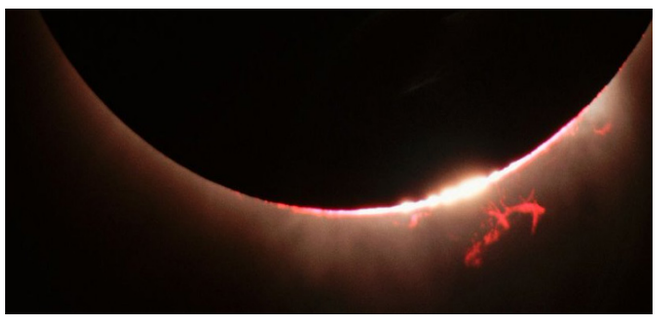
LONDON, 4 APRIL

Researchers in North America are gearing up for their chance to observe the Sun's corona — its wispy outer atmosphere — like never before. Normally hidden to the naked eye by the Sun's glare, the corona will be visible to millions from Sinaloa, Mexico, to Newfoundland, Canada, when the Moon blocks the solar disk during the total eclipse on 8 April. Importantly, the event coincides with the solar maximum — a period of extreme activity that occurs every 11 years. During this time, the Sun's magnetic fields intensify, creating sunspots, fiery loops of plasma and exciting structures in the corona.

The Sun's outer atmosphere, named for its crown-like appearance, is one of astronomy's biggest unsolved mysteries, says James Klimchuk, a solar physicist at the NASA Goddard Spaceflight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. For decades, scientists have been scratching their heads about why the corona, a hot plasma that extends millions of kilometres from the core, is so much hotter than the solar surface. "It's like if you walk away from a campfire," Klimchuk says, but instead of cooling down, you get warmer.

"Why would that be?" They also have puzzled over what gives the corona its intricate structure (see 'Crown jewels').

Earth experiences total eclipses roughly once every 18 months. But their paths often cross remote areas, where few people can view them.



This time Sun's magnetic fields intensify& create sunspots *PHOTO: X/@MARCUSBWEBSTER*

Simulating the Sun

A preview of how it might appear during the eclipse was released last month by Predictive Science, a research and product-development firm in San Diego, California. Staff members, including astrophysicist Cooper Downs, used real-time satellite data of the Sun's surface magnetic fields and intensive supercomputer simulations to make the prediction. "The Sun is quite chaotic," Downs says.

Staring at the sun — close-up images from space rewrite solar science

The firm's prediction shows a corona composed of several spiky, spade-like structures called streamers, in which coronal plasma is tightly confined by magnetic field lines that leave the Sun's surface but loop back into it. Streamers glow brighter than other parts of the corona because electrons in the denser plasma scatter sunlight. The prediction also shows coronal holes, darker regions between the streamers where magnetic field lines don't loop back into the Sun but extend into interplanetary space.

Photo OP

Because the Moon perfectly blocks the solar disk during an eclipse — owing to the cosmic coincidence that the Sun and Moon have similar sizes when viewed from Earth — solar physicists on the ground, including Shadia Habbal at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu, will be able to study the Sun's chromosphere next week.

Flying High

One group that is not worried about clouds is the Airborne Coronal Emission Surveyor team. These scientists will fly in a Gulfstream V jet above the clouds, at an altitude exceeding 13 kilometres. This will put them over a layer of water vapour in Earth's atmosphere that absorbs infrared light and would interfere with their measurements of the corona. *—Courtesy: Nature*

Sensex, Nifty hit record highs; HDFC, TCS gain

Sensex touches 74,501.73 & Nifty hit fresh peak of 22,514.65

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply to hit record fresh highs on Thursday. They were propped up by buying in IT, consumer durables and financial stocks amid expectations of a robust corporate performance.

Besides, investors lapped up select banking stocks expecting a status quo in the interest rate decision of the RBI's monetary policy committee, analysts said.

The six-member rate-setting panel, which began its deliberation on Wednesday, will announce the decision on Friday.

The 30-share BSE Sensex surged 350.81 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at its lifetime high of 74,227.63. During the day, the index oscillated between the high of 74,501.73 and the low of 73,485.12. The broader NSE Nifty also hit its fresh peak of 22,514.65, gaining 80 points or 0.36 per cent. As many as 31 components of the 50-share benchmark ended with gains. Both indices had ended lower in the previous two sessions. On March 7, Sensex recorded its previous peak of 74,119.39. Nifty scaled its previous high of 22,493.55.

The breadth of the market displayed a positive trend within a narrow trading range **PHOTO: PTI**

- Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply to hit record fresh highs on Thursday, propped up by buying in IT, consumer durables and financial stocks amid expectations of a robust corporate performance.

Among the Sensex constituents, 20 stocks ended the session in green with HDFC Bank, Titan, Tech Mahindra, and Asian Paints being the major gainers. TCS, Maruti, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Bajaj Finserve were the other gainers. In contrast, SBI, Bharti Airtel, JSW Steel, PowerGrid, ITC and Reliance closed the trading with losses. BSE LargeCap gained 0.34 per cent and smallcap rose 0.54 per cent, while the midcap index lost marginally by 0.11 per cent. The breadth of the market displayed a positive trend within a narrow trading range, with attention focused on the RBI's upcoming monetary policy announcement on Friday. "Expectations lean towards the likely status quo in the repo rate due to prevalent inflation worries. "Meanwhile, the broader market has shown resilience in select sectors like banks in anticipation of decent Q4 results and exports based on composite PMI data reflecting strong business conditions," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. On Wednesday, the BSE benchmark Sensex declined by 27.09 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 73,876.82. The NSE Nifty declined 18.65 points or 0.08 per cent to 22,434.65.

—PTI

Gold jumps ₹850 to hit fresh all-time high of ₹70K

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Gold prices surged by Rs 850 to reach a new peak of Rs 70,050 per 10 grams on Thursday on strong global cues, according to HDFC Securities. This is the second straight session that precious metal prices have hit all-time high levels. In the previous trade, the precious metal had settled at Rs 69,200 per 10 grams.

Silver prices also zoomed Rs 1,000 to hit record Rs 81,700 per kg. In the previous session, it had finished at Rs 80,700 per kg.

In the international markets, spot gold at COMEX was trading at USD 2,297 per ounce, up by USD 22 from. Gold touched yet another record after Federal Reserve confirmed that an interest rate cut will take place soon.

—PTI

Rupee rises 9 paise to close at 83.44 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

The rupee on Thursday recovered 9 paise to close at 83.44 (provisional) against the US dollar, tracking a firm trend in domestic markets and upbeat macroeconomic data. A weak US dollar against major crosses overseas also supported the domestic unit. However, elevated crude oil prices and sustained foreign fund outflows capped the sharp gain, forex traders said.

Moreover, market participants remained cautious ahead of the Reserve Bank's rate-setting panel's decision to be announced on Friday, they added. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.44 against the greenback. The unit hit an intraday high of 83.42 and a low of 83.46. The local unit finally settled at 83.44 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 9 paise from its previous close.

—PTI

Suparna Mitra is Swiggy's new director

BENGALURU, 4 MARCH

Food-delivery and quick commerce major Swiggy has appointed Suparna Mitra as an independent director to its board, the firm said on Thursday. Mitra is the chief executive of the watches and wearables division of Titan Company, which is partly owned by Tata Sons. Mitra joins three other independent directors on Swiggy's board. These include board chair Anand Kripalu, who is also the managing director and chief executive of specialty packaging company Essel Propack, Shailesh Haribhakti, chairman of financial services firm Shailesh Haribhakti & Associates, and Sahil Barua, cofounder and chief executive of listed logistics major Delhivery. Mitra's appointment to Swiggy's board comes after Tractor And Farm Equipment Ltd (TAFE) chairperson Mallika Srinivasan stepped down as an independent director in February this year. At the time, Swiggy said Srinivasan was stepping down due to "increasing business commitments," without explaining further. Srinivasan, Barua and Haribhakti were the first set of independent directors to join the Swiggy board, in February of 2023.

—PTI

Honda names Shimzu as new marketing director

NOIDA, 4 APRIL

Honda Cars India on Thursday said it has appointed Ryuto Shimizu as the company's new Director (Marketing & Sales). He replaces Yuichi Murata who has moved to Honda Mexico as President. Shimizu has been associated with Honda for over 25 years and has worked across several international markets during the span of his career including Japan, China and Thailand, the automaker said in a statement. He has worked across the domain of marketing & sales including product planning, overseas operations, and business planning, among others, it added. Prior to joining Honda Cars India, he was in-charge of the Business Planning Office at Honda Automobile (Thailand) Co Ltd from 2021-2023. *—PTI*

ONION, TOMATO PRICES SURGE

Veg thali gets dearer by 7% in March: Crisil

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

The cost of a vegetarian thali became dearer by 7 per cent in March primarily due to the rise in onion, tomato, and potato prices, an arm of domestic rating agency Crisil said on Thursday.

A cool down in poultry prices led to a 7 per cent decline in non-vegetarian thali, Crisil Market Intelligence and Analysis said in its monthly "Roti Rice Rate" report.

The cost of a vegetable thali -- comprising roti, vegetables (onions, tomatoes and potatoes), rice, dal, curd and salad -- increased to Rs 27.3 per plate in March from Rs 25.5 in the year-ago period, but was cheaper than Rs 27.4 in February 2024, it said.

"The cost of the veg thali increased due to a surge of 40 per cent, 36 per cent and 22 per cent on-year in prices of onion, tomato and potato, respectively, due to lower arrivals of onion and potato and low base of last fiscal for tomatoes," the report said.

The report also noted that due to lower arrivals, prices of rice increased 14 per cent and pulses by 22 per cent when compared to the year-ago period.

PHOTO: PTI

In the case of non-veg thali, in which only dal gets replaced by chicken, the price declined to Rs 54.9 as against Rs 59.2 in the year-ago period, but was higher when compared with Rs 54 per thali in preceding February.

A 16 per cent decline in the cost of the broiler prices, which has a 50 per cent weight in the overall price, was the primary reason for the decline in the cost of non-vegetarian thali on a year-on-year basis, it said.

When compared with February, the prices of broiler increased 5 per cent because of the start of the holy month of Ramadan and higher demand, the report said. *—PTI*

India's services sector growth hits nearly 14 year high in March: PMI

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

India's services sector witnessed one of the strongest growth rates in over 13-and-a-half years in March on the back of strong demand that spurred sales and business activity, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index rose from 60.6 in February to 61.2 in March, one of the strongest expansions in total sales and business activity in close to 14 years.

In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

The HSBC India Services PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 service sector companies.

PHOTO: PTI

The upturn was largely attributed to healthy demand conditions, efficiency gains, and positive sales developments, the survey said.

Companies signalled a substantial improvement in new order intakes during March. The rate of growth was one of the best seen since June 2010.

New export business rose at the fastest rate since the series started in September 2014. Survey participants reported gains from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, the Americas, and the Middle East.

Services companies indicated that the substantial upturn in new business volumes added pressure on their capacities. Accordingly, service providers recruited additional staff in March.

"The latest increase in employment was the 22nd in as many months, and the joint-strongest since November 2022," the survey said.

The survey further noted that there has been an intensification of price pressures, with both input costs and output charges increasing at faster rates.

"Input costs rose at a faster rate, yet service providers were able to broadly maintain margins by charging higher output prices," the survey said.

—PTI

DESPITE EXPORT BAN

India exports 10,000 tonnes onion to UAE

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

India has allowed a limited quantity of onion exports to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), defying the extended ban on onion exports imposed until further notice.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, through the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), issued a notification on Wednesday, permitting the export of an additional 10,000 metric tons (MT) of onions to the UAE, facilitated through the National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL).

This allowance comes as a significant exception amid the prevailing ban on onion exports. The notification is issued under the authority in line with the Foreign Trade Policy, 2023. It amends the previous notification extending the quota of onion exports to the UAE, despite the ban extension. This decision traces back to earlier announcements by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, wherein the ban on onion exports was extended indefinitely until further orders. Notably, the ban extension was confirmed through a notification dated March 22, prohibiting the export of onions.

India's onion export policy has seen several alterations in recent months. Initially, a ban on onion exports was imposed until 31 March. However, notifications extended the ban, allowing exceptions for specific countries based on their requests and India's discretion.

Earlier this month, India granted permission for the export of 50,000 tonnes of onions to Bangladesh and 14,400 tonnes to the UAE, signalling a departure from the blanket ban approach. *—PTI*

India's onion export policy has seen several alterations in recent months **PHOTO: PTI**

HDFC merger slows down securitisation growth in FY24

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

The overall securitisation volume growth slowed to 4 per cent in FY24 to Rs 1.88 lakh crore due to the impact of the HDFC twins merger, domestic rating agency Icra said on Thursday.

In FY23, the securitisation volume had grown by 33 per cent to Rs 1.80 lakh crore, and mortgage major HDFC was the biggest originator.

In a report, the agency said it expects the volume of securitisation - where a lender typically transfers the future receivables on a loan asset against upfront payment - to cross Rs 2 lakh crore in FY25.

The share of pass-through certificates (PTCs) rose to 57 per cent of the market for FY24 against 40 per cent observed in the past couple of years, mainly due to the exit of HDFC, which sold mortgage loans through the direct assignment (DA) route.

Vehicle loans continue to form the biggest asset class in PTC issuances, whereas microfinance and mortgage loans are largely securitised through DAs, it said.

Small business loans and personal loans have been consistently increasing their participation in the market, while the current proportion remains relatively lower in the overall volumes, it said.

The agency said it saw a rise in securitisation volume originated by non-financial sector entities, where trade receivables and lease rentals are being securitised, thus helping in widening and diversifying the PTC market in the future. *—PTI*

House sales rise 9%, office leasing up 43%

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Housing sales rose by 9 per cent annually while office demand increased 43 per cent during the January-March period across eight major cities on better demand for luxury homes and premium workspace, according to property consultant Knight Frank India.

Releasing its 'India Real Estate: Office and Residential Report (January-March 2024)' through a webinar on Thursday, Knight Frank India said housing prices rose in the range of 2-13 per cent annually during January-March across these eight cities -- Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Pune and Ahmedabad. Office rent grew by 1-9 per cent.

As per the data, the housing sales increased to 86,345 units across eight major cities in January-March compared with 79,126 units in the year-ago period.

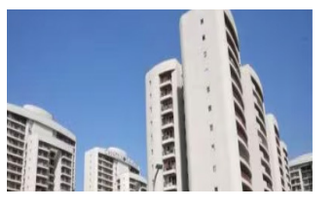


PHOTO: PTI

The gross leasing of office space went up 43 per cent to 16.2 million square feet in January-March this year from 11.3 million square feet in the corresponding period of the previous year.

According to the data, housing sales in Mumbai rose 17 per cent to 23,743 units during January-March this year from 20,300 units in the year-ago period.

Office leasing in the city increased 29 per cent to 2.8 million square feet from 2.2 million square feet.

Delhi-NCR saw 1 per cent increase in housing sales to 15,527 units from 15,392 units, while office demand in the region rose 19 per cent to 3.1 million square feet from 2.6 million square feet.

In Bengaluru, housing sales dipped 2 per cent to 13,133 units from 13,390 units while the office demand in the IT city remained flat at 3.5 million square feet.

Housing sales in Pune grew 14 per cent to 11,832 units from 10,368 units, while office demand jumped more than two times to 1.9 million square feet from 0.8 million square feet. *—PTI*

INDIA'S MUSTARD OUTPUT MAY TOUCH ALL-TIME HIGH: SEA

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Mustard seed production is likely to touch an all-time high of 12 million tonnes in the 2023-24 season in view of a record sown area of 10 million hectares, according to the industry body SEA. Mustard seed is an important oilseed crop grown during the rabi (winter) season during September-October and harvested in February-March.

In a statement, the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) said the concerted efforts to expand the area through the mustard model farm project, coupled with favourable weather and prices, India has witnessed a remarkable increase in mustard production year after year.

—PTI

BUOYANT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

'Senior jobs to see 20% pay hike'

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Salary hike in senior level job roles is expected to reach an average of 20 per cent this year, as nurturing talent and fostering innovation remains a key focus area for companies amid the country's buoyant economic conditions, says a report.

According to the Michael Page India Salary Guide 2024, there is a resurgence in hiring within traditional industries, particularly evident in the continued high demand for manufacturing and operations roles.

Additionally, there's a notable surge in the need for professionals skilled in data analytics, generative AI, and machine learning across various sectors.

F **PHOTO: PTI**

The annual guidance report covers the key sectors of BFSI, engineering & manufacturing, finance & accounting, healthcare & lifesciences, human resources, legal, compliance, procurement & supply chain, property & construction, sales & marketing, and technology.

According to the report, India's 6 per cent GDP growth coupled with significant domestic investments and independence from external factors, positions India uniquely in the region, even amidst global challenges.

"With India's economy displaying such resilience and optimism, and surpassing its pre-COVID performance, the focus is now on harnessing this potential. Nurturing talent and fostering innovation thus remains a key," said Ankit Agarwala, Managing Director at PageGroup.

Agarwala further noted that the IT services industry, a cornerstone of the Indian economy, is witnessing a phase of recalibration. Companies are moderating their approach to salary increments, with expected hikes around 8 per cent-10 per cent. *—PTI*

DMART SHARES HIT 52-WK HIGH; REGAINS MCAP OF ₹3L CRORE

BENGALURU, 4 APRIL

The market valuation of Avenue Supermarts, which operates supermarket chain DMart, regained the Rs 3 lakh crore-mark in the mid-session trade on Thursday, as the company's shares touched a 52-week high on the bourses.

The company's shares surged after DMart owner posted a rise of up to 20 per cent in its standalone revenue from operations to Rs 12,393.46 crore for the March quarter.

The stock of the company climbed 3.73 per cent to Rs 4,626 apiece on the BSE.

On the NSE, scrip of Avenue Supermarts went up by 3.66 per cent to Rs 4,623.95 per piece. *—PTI*

TRAI begins consultation on pricing for spectrum bands

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Telecom regulator Trai on Thursday sought stakeholder views on the auction of new three spectrum bands-- 3737.5 GHz, 37.540 GHz and 42.543.5 GHz for mobile services, as it released a consultation paper to discuss issues related to pricing, validity and payment terms of these radiowaves.

This is the first time three spectrum bands in 37-37.5 Ghz, 37.5-40 Ghz and 42.5-43.5 Ghz are being proposed for the auction. The proposal will make available 4,000 Mhz spectrum for 5G services in the future.

These blocks are different from the bands -- 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz, 2,500 MHz, 3,300 MHz, and 26 GHz which that be put on the block in the upcoming spectrum auctions scheduled for 6 June.

Trai, in the consultation paper, has sought industry's opinion on various nuances of the auction of spectrum in these new bands, including pricing, validity, preferred block size, spectrum caps, rollout obligations, and other terms and conditions. In all, 4,000 MHz of frequency spectrum will be available in each Licensed Service Area (LSA) in these ranges.

The 37-37.5 GHz band is for mobile services. *—PTI*

भादूविप्रा TRAI

PHOTO: PTI

We didn't get a choice: Rabada on scheduling fiasco

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Still bitter about the scheduling fiasco that forced him and other senior players to miss a two-Test series against New Zealand earlier this year, South Africa pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada says they were not given a say in the "unacceptable" botch-up. As many as seven uncapped players were named for the series which was a part of the World Test Championship, even as first-choice players were involved in the SA20 league at home. Neil Brand, who captained the team in New Zealand, made his Test debut during the opening game in Mount Maunganui and the hosts expectedly won the series 2-0. Looking back at that controversial episode, Rabada hoped players will not have to go through such unsavoury moments again. *—PTI*

Indian football team drops four places to 121

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

The Indian football men's team dropped four places to 121 in the latest FIFA rankings, its worst in recent years, following an embarrassing 1-2 defeat against Afghanistan in the second round of the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers in Guwahati last month.The Igor Stimac-coached side, which had broken into the top-100 last year, having won the Intercontinental Cup, the Tri-Nations tournament and the SAFF Championship, on 26 March suffered a shocking defeat at home to lowly-ranked Afghanistan to continue its poor run of late. Even though the team registered a win against Kuwait in the World Cup qualifiers, its first away win in over two decades, the forgettable outing at the AFC Asian Cup 2023 in Qatar, where the side lost all its matches without scoring a single goal. *—PTI*

S African footballer Luke Fleurs killed in hijacking

JOHANNESBURG, 4 APRIL

South African footballer and Olympian Luke Fleurs has been killed in a hijacking in Johannesburg, his Kaizer Chiefs club said on Thursday. The 24-year-old defender was shot while waiting to be attended to at a petrol station in the Honeydew suburb in Johannesburg, according to police. "Fleurs tragically lost his life last night during a hijacking incident in Johannesburg. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends at this difficult time," Kaizer Chiefs said in a statement. According to police spokesperson Mavela Masondo, the attackers fled with Fleur's vehicle and police were investigating a case of murder and car hijacking. He previously played for the national under-23 side, representing South Africa at the Tokyo Olympics. *—AP*

Pak Hockey Fed wants Oltmans to coach nat'l team

KARACHI, 4 APRIL

The escalating crisis over its governance notwithstanding, the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has approached renowned Dutch coach Roelant Oltmans, who was associated with Indian hockey for nearly five years, to take charge of the national team.

The crisis-ridden and cash-strapped PHF, asked Oltmans to coach the Pakistan team in the the Azlan Shah Cup and the Nations Cup, set to be held in Malaysia and Poland respectively in May-June. But even as the secretary of one faction of the PHF, Rana Mujahid confirmed approaching Oltmans who has been with the Pakistan team before and also coached the juniors last year, the secretary of the other group Haider Hussain warned the federation could face suspension from the sport's body. *—PTI*

PV Sindhu opts out of Uber Cup for Olympics prep

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

Double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu and the two top women's doubles pairs have opted out of the Uber Cup but a strong men's team will take the court for its title defence in the Thomas Cup, commencing in Chengdu from 27 April.

Sindhu, who has played six tournaments since returning to action at the Badminton Asia Team Championships in February, pulled out of the event to give herself more time to recover and be battle-ready for the Paris Olympics.

Top women's doubles pairs Treesa Jolly-Gayatri Gopichand and Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto -- also withdrew since it is not a full strength team with Sindhu missing.

They chose to focus on the other assignments as they strive to earn the Olympics qualification. Following the withdrawal of Sindhu and the two pairs, Badminton Association of India (BAI) decided to reward the players who performed at the Senior National Championships by give them the India cap.

PV Sindhu, who has played six tournaments since returning to action at the Badminton Asia Team Championships in February *PHOTO: PTI*

"Sindhu opted out as she is coming back from an injury and she wants to give herself enough time to prepare for Paris Games where she will hope to win another medal for the country," BAI secretary Sanjay Mishra told PTI.

"The doubles pairs also decided to skip the event as they too have been playing a lot of tournaments and want to focus on their qualification, so we have rewarded the semifinalists of the national championships by including them in the team."

India are the defending champions in Thomas Cup, having clinched the epic crown in 2022.

The selectors decided to field a strong squad with a perfect mix of youth and experience.

The Indian men's team had created history in Thailand when they defeated formidable Indonesia 3-0 in the final to clinch their first-ever Thomas Cup crown.

The senior selection committee also decided to have more options in singles considering the hectic schedule of all players this season.

—PTI

Kazakhstan Challenge: 5 Indian women shuttlers enter QF

ASTANA, 4 APRIL

Anmol Kharb *PHOTO: BAI*

Young shuttler Anmol Kharb continued to impress as she progressed to the women's singles quarterfinals along with four other Indians in the Kazakhstan International Challenge here on Thursday.

Besides Anmol, in-form Devika Sihag, former national champion Anupama Upadhaya, seventh seed Tanya Hemanth and Isharani Baruah also entered the last 8 in women's singles.

Reigning senior national champion Anmol, who played a pivotal role in the Indian women's team winning an unprecedented gold at the Badminton Asia Team Championships in February, beat UAE's Nurani Ratu Azzahra 21-11 21-7 in the second round.

The 17-year-old Anmol will face Japan's Sorano Yoshikawa next. Sihag, who won two international challenge titles out of the four finals that she reached this season, outwitted fourth-seeded Azerbaijan's Keisha Fatimah Azzahra 21-12 21-12 to set up a meeting with compatriot Anupama, who beat Czech Republic's fifth seed Tereza Švabikova.

Seventh seed Tanya saw off Israel's Ksenia Polikarpova 21-11 21-18 and will next square off against fellow Indian Isharani, who accounted for New Zealand's Tiffany Ho 21-10 20-14.

Sihag won the Swedish Open and Portugal International, while finishing runner-up at Estonian International and Dutch International. In men's singles, Ravi, Bharat Raghav and Tharun Mannepalli progressed to the quarterfinals.

—PTI

IPL: Mustafizur-less CSK face unpredictable Hyderabad

HYDERABAD, 4 APRIL

Without their in-form bowler Mustafzur Rahman, Chennai Super Kings will need to sharpen their all-round game when they take on an unpredictable Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL here on Friday.

Consistency is the hallmark of CSK who would be looking to restore "normal service" following their first loss of the season against Delhi Capitals.

It is a long tournament and an odd dip in performance is expected, as mentioned by the CSK captain Ruturaj Gaikwad after the game in Visakhapatnam. However, he and his opening partner Rachin Ravindra will need to be ready for the moving ball after being found wanting on that front against Delhi.

The majority of cricketing world wants MS Dhoni to bat higher than number eight, especially after his 16-ball 37 in the last match *PHOTO: PTI*

The majority of cricketing world wants MS Dhoni to bat higher than number eight, especially after his 16-ball 37 in the last match *PHOTO: PTI*

The majority of cricketing world wants MS Dhoni to bat higher than number eight, especially after his 16-ball 37 in the last match which is very first outing with the bat this season. However, that is unlikely to happen as Dhoni would want the likes of Shivam Dube and Sameer Rizvi to finish the job ahead of him. In the bowling department, CSK will need to rethink their combination with Mustafzur back in Bangladesh to process his visa for the T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean. The overseas combine of Mustafzur and Matheesha Pathirana had been working well for CSK who could bring in a like-for-like replacement for the Bangladesh cricketer in Mukesh Choudhary. Shardul Thakur is also yet to get a game thus far. Their Opposition Sunrisers Hyderabad will be looking to make the most of home comforts in their second game at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD vs CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch:
Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Rajiv Gandhi Stadium, Hyderabad

IPL RECORDS HIGHEST EVER TV VIEWERSHIP IN FIRST 10 MATCHES

MUMBAI, 4 APRIL

The Indian Premier League recorded a TV viewership of 35 crore in its first 10 matches, which is higher than any previous edition of the tournament including the seasons played during Covid-19 pandemic, the event's official broadcaster said. As per BARC data released by Disney Star, the overall watch-time for the tournament has sky-rocketed to 8028 crore minutes which is 20 per cent higher than last year. "We are overwhelmed with the record-breaking viewing figures for IPL. Disney Star has started the 17th season from where it left off last year, doubling down on fan-centred initiatives that seek to drive passion and fandom for the tournament," Sanjog Gupta, Head of Disney Star said. Disney Star is broadcasting IPL across 14 feeds in 10 languages with a special feed in Indian Sign Language for Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Visually Impaired fans. *—PTI*

PRAGGNANADHAA TO MEET FIROUZA IN THE OPENER

TORONTO, 4 APRIL

India's best bet, Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa will start his campaign against French Alireza Firouza and it will be an all-Indian affair between D Gukesh and Vidit Gujrathi in the first round of the Candidates chess tournament that has begun here.

An all-American duel will be fought between two highest-ranked players Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura. In the other contest of the day, Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan will take on the lone Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi.

In the women's section too, the two Indians, R Vaishali and Koneru Humpy are pitted against each other and the two Russians Aleksandra Goryachkina and Kateryna Lagno will also be battling out in the first round. The two Chinese Lei Tingjie and Tan Zhongyi are also slated to meet each other and Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine will face the youngest participant Nurgyul Salimova of Bulgaria.

While the pairings were announced a few weeks ago, the only thing that might matter is the start for each of the eight participants in the double round-robin events that will select the challenger to the next world championship match. The time control for the event is 40 moves in two hours and 30 minutes for the rest of the game with an increment of 30 seconds per move starting from move 41. "This is going to be interesting; the time control means that we have to keep an eye on the clock as there is no increment for first 40 moves," Pragg said.Pragg may have an edge as the second half is where most of the things unfold. *—PTI*

The annual award huge thing: Hockey Player of the Year

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

A first-time winner of the Hockey India women's Player of the Year honour, mid-fielder Salima Tete says the award is significant not just for her morale but is also a "huge thing" for her farmer family back in Jharkhand due to the prize cheque of Rs 25 lakh that came with it.

The 22-year-old was rewarded for her consistency in the game throughout the year, in the Hockey India annual gala on Sunday last.

"When my family heard that I had been presented the award, they were also really proud of me.

As part of the honour, we also receive cash incentives, which is also a huge thing for me. When I win this money, my family wins this money," Tete said in a press release issued by Hockey India.

"I express my gratitude to Hockey India for making such provisions, and because of their support, I am able to provide and help my family members in our day-to-day lives," she added.

Tete was earlier named Player of the Tournament during the 2023 Women's Asian Champions Trophy, when she smashed five goals and helped India win the trophy in her home state.

Tete was also a part of India's bronze medal-winning Asian Games team in 2022 and scored one goal in the multi-sport event.

"It feels great to be recognised with the huge award for the first time in my career. This is a big honour and will be a huge motivation for me throughout my career," she said.

Tete said the honour has increased her motivation level and has also made her conscious about her responsibility towards the team.

—PTI

Saudi to host WTA Finals for next 3 years

SAUDI, 4 APRIL

Saudi Arabia will host the WTA Finals as part of a three-year deal announced Thursday by the women's professional tennis tour that will increase the prize money for this November's season-ending championship to a record $15.25 million, a 70% increase from 2023.

The event for the top eight singles players and top eight doubles teams will be held in Riyadh from 2024-26, part of a recent wave of investment by the kingdom in tennis and various sports, despite questions about LGBTQ+ and women's rights there raised by Hall of Famers Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova and others.

"We're going into this eyes wide open that the investment in sport by Saudi certainly provokes strong views from people," WTA Tour Chairman and CEO Steve Simon told Associated Press.

"We've met with Chris and Martina and listened to their concerns and we have shared their concerns through our stakeholders as well, without prejudice. We've also shared the concerns around women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights within the Kingdom of Saudi. Our focus is on how we develop women's tennis for the benefit of everybody involved in the game. The reality of it is ... we are truly a global tour, a global business. We have players from over 90 nations now. We have over 90 events. ... We participate in many countries that have different cultures and values systems across the board." *—AP*

DOPING

India records highest number of adverse findings with 2,000 samples being tested

NEW DELHI, 4 APRIL

India registered the highest percentage of failed dope tests among countries which tested more than 2,000 samples with South Africa being second in the 2022 Testing Figures Report released by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

India tested 3865 samples (urine, and blood combined) during the recorded period, of which 125 returned adverse analytical findings. This amounts to 3.2 per cent of the samples, the WADA said in its report released late on Wednesday.

In terms of number of samples tested, India was 11th on the list but the number of doping violations were higher than major sporting nations like Russia (85), USA (84), Italy (73) and France (72). South Africa returned the next highest percentage of adverse findings -- 2.9 per cent from 2033 tested samples.

In a latest report released by the World Anti-Doping Agency, India registered the highest percentage of failed dope tests among countries which tested more than 2000 samples. *PHOTO: PTI*

The third place was taken by Kazakhstan with 1.9 per cent of its testing pool of 2174 samples returning adverse findings. The fourth highest percentage came from Norway and the USA. While the USA tested 6782 samples, Norway's count was 2075.

China tested the highest number of samples -- 19,228 -- during the period with an adverse findings percentage of 0.2 per cent. Germany tested 13,653 samples of which 0.3 per cent tested positive for banned substances.

"WADA's Annual Testing Figures Report is the most comprehensive overview of all doping control samples...," WADA Director General Olivier Niggli said in a statement. "The Testing Figures Report is an important tool for collaboration between Anti-Doping Organisations," he added. *—PTI*